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# THE ENCHANTED STONE



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**FROM**

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# The Enchanted Stone



# The Enchanted Stone

BY  
LEWIS HIND



NEW YORK  
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY  
1899



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# The Enchanted Stone



## CHAPTER I

### THE YELLOW MAN LOSES HIS APPEAL

**A**S a reporter I was conscientious. One morning — memorable morning — my instructions said: ‘The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council meet at noon. Try a special, say 1500 words. Be visual. Don’t particularise.’

At half-past eleven I set out for the Privy Council Office in Downing Street — home of the Judicial Committee. An attendant waved me into the court room, where seven ruddy Law Lords sat around a mahogany table.

Two of them I knew by sight — the Lord Chancellor who lolled in the chair, and Sir Thomas Hiram, ex-Indian judge,

monthly magazine occultist, and part author of an egregious work on necromancy.

I noticed the Yellow Man immediately.

More than common tall, he stood in the embrasure of the third window, rigid as a carven saint, a ray of sunlight illuminating the ruby that gleamed in his little yellow turban. His head was small, poised delicately upon a long, lithe body, which was clad in a tight lemon-coloured garment falling in straight folds from neck to ankles, with bell-shaped sleeves. His skin, stretched tight over his hairless face, was the colour of parchment, yellow with age. His eyes, deep-set and piercing, were fixed upon Sir Thomas Hiram's gold spectacles.

Oriental in blazing garments well-nigh filled the public benches.

I found a seat next to a fellow-countryman — a youth who seemed to find the proceedings amusing.

His expression was frank, his complexion like a girl's, his hair short, fair, and

curly, and he owned a merry eye; he wore a magnificent finger ring. Altogether he was a sunny little person, as full of antics as a child. For example, it pleased him to use his ring as an eye-glass, through which he glared in mock-judicial severity at the Yellow Man.

‘What’s the case?’ I whispered. His manner invited confidence.

‘Custody of an historic jewel,’ he answered, with a friendly smile; ‘they’ve been fighting for years about it. The yellow chappie claims the thing. This is his last chance. The case has gone against him in all the Indian Courts. It’s the Bank of England to a banana that he loses. I’m going to follow him up when the case is over. He interests me. I spend half my time following people up who interest me. Look, Sir Thomas is going to speak. How they prick their ears! He’s a swell Orientalist, and they know it.’

Sir Thomas adjusted his spectacles and opened his lips. Clearly it had been his

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intention to speak, but he suddenly changed his mind. The fidgety lips closed with a snap. He collapsed into his chair and stared at the Yellow Man.

In the embarrassed pause that followed, an officer approached the table. There was a whispered consultation and a nodding of white heads. Then the Lord Chancellor proceeded to deliver judgment.

I glanced at my companion. 'Did you follow it?' he asked.

'A sudden faintness, I suppose. It's an oppressive day.'

'Not a bit of it. Law Lords don't faint. Pardon!'

I inclined my head. 'Fix your eyes upon the Yellow Man's bare left arm, just above the wrist. Well?'

'I see the edge of a tattoo mark.'

'Precisely. Well, when Sir Thomas indicated that he was to be delivered of a speech the Yellow Man's arm shot out, disclosing the whole design. Sir Thomas saw the symbol. Sir Thomas was struck

dumb. Now, why should a tattoo mark on an Oriental's arm silence Sir Thomas? Hullo, here's the end.'

Brief was the Lord Chancellor's judgment. He had already reached his peroration.

'Therefore, Her Lordships will humbly advise Her Majesty to dismiss the appeal.'

As he ended, the Yellow Man rose from his seat and glided to the door.

My companion smiled a good-bye to me. 'I must know more about that fellow,' he whispered.

A moment later I noticed his ring lying upon the desk. I picked it up, and knowing that my only chance of restoring it was to sight him before he left the precincts of the Court, I, too, sought the door.

So we three — odd lot — whose destiny it was to be so closely associated, started upon our first little journey together. As I ran down the steps of the Privy Council Office I spied him disappearing round the



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corner of Downing Street. From that moment I kept my quarry in sight, down Parliament Street, over Westminster Bridge, till, hot and breathless, I came up with him outside a dingy house in a narrow street in Lambeth.

He thanked me volubly and laughed a happy laugh; then, as it were, brushing the incident of the ring aside, he cried, 'Let himself in here. My curiosity is aroused. I boil! Ah! Will you follow?'

Opposite stood a block of model dwellings. Through the open door he darted and ascended the stairs, pausing a moment before each landing window. At the third floor he stopped. Kneeling, we looked across the narrow street into the top windows of the opposite house. In the middle of the apartment glowed a brazier of live coals, leaping intermittently into flame, and around it stood seven Orientals, listening intently to the Yellow Man, who was haranguing them.

The lecture was impassioned but brief.

When it ended, a document was handed to one of the seven, who hastily left the room, reappearing in a few seconds in the street.

‘Follow him! Follow him! Follow him!’ cried my companion, ‘and come to me later at The Albany — D 10; Mayfair is my name.’

‘But ——’

‘Oh, don’t talk, there’s a good fellow, but follow him — quick, quick! Mayfair — D 10 The Albany.’

Well, I followed, for the boy’s manner took me — followed the Oriental to the office of the Eastern Telegraph Co. at Charing Cross, where he despatched a message. That done I strolled to The Albany.

I found the youth packing a large portmanteau. He grasped my hand warmly.

‘The man despatched a telegram from the Eastern Telegraph Co. at Charing Cross,’ I said.

‘Ah, I thought as much.’

‘And you?’

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'I followed the Yellow Man.'

'Well?'

'He dressed himself in his best — gorgeous yellow silk things, all covered with diamonds, and drove off in a carriage and pair.'

'And you followed?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

He drew near me, mystery in his movements. 'To the Prime Minister's house. Listen! I leave London to-morrow morning. It's imperative. Now, I want you to keep an eye on those Orientals, particularly upon the Yellow Man. There's something *up*. Oh, 'e's a daisy.

'E's a daisy, 'e's a ducky, 'e's a lamb!' crooned this extraordinary youth, filling up the interstices of his portman-teau with odd socks and handkerchiefs as he sang:

'E's a injia-rubber idiot on the spree,

'E's the on'y thing that does n't give a damn

For 'er Majesty's Judicial Commit-tee.

‘You ’ll keep an eye upon him.’

‘If—if you wish it very much. But  
——,’

‘Delightful man! Oh, by the bye,  
what do you do?’

‘Journalism.’

‘Ah!’

He walked rapidly up and down the  
room, his mobile face alight with ideas.

‘Ever heard of Madame de Gruchy?’  
he asked suddenly.

‘The millionairess who adopts orphans  
and changes her religion once a fortnight?’

‘That’s the party. Also known as  
the Little Mother. Lives at St. Wees,  
in Cornwall. Her present occupation  
is —— But never mind that now. Well,  
I’m her private secretary.’

‘You! I thought she was a serious  
person.’

‘So she is,’ he shouted. ‘My aunt!  
so she is! Nevertheless, I’m her private  
secretary, and I guess you’re the man to  
edit the new paper she’s burning to start.

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No, not a word. I know a good man when I see him. Leave it to me. We — that is, the Little Mother, the orphans, and myself — are due in Paris to-morrow night, and Mürren in a week's time. When you receive a wire, come as fast as boat and train will bring you. By Jove! it's two minutes past seven, and I'm dining three men at the club at the hour. Forgive this unceremonious departure, and when you receive a telegram, come. I'll make it all right.'

By this time we were outside the front door, and he was flying down the rope-walk towards Piccadilly. He stopped before he had gone twenty yards, and came tearing back. 'Your address,' he shouted, 'you have n't given it to me.'

'13 Buckingham Street, Strand,' I said.

He pencilled it upon his shirt cuff, and started off again, waving his hand ere he disappeared through the swing doors.

I leant against a pillar to recover my breath and my senses.

## CHAPTER II

### THE POWER OF THE TRIPLE FLAME SYMBOL

**E**IGHT days later I received a telegram from the volatile youth bidding me prepare for a peremptory summons to Switzerland. His method was amusing, and I cottoned to his humour, for in those days I was all things to all men, and nothing very long. In the letter that followed, he said, 'It's about the new paper, so do not fail, and do not forget the Yellow Man and his troop. I'm awful curious about them, and the Little Mother seems inclined to catch on. We count upon your eyes. The air here is like a caress. I awake at sunrise. I go out upon the hills. Oh, how good it is to be alive!'

Well, I might pursue the matter, or I might not; at any rate the task of studying the Orientals was agreeable and in-

teresting, and I fell easily into the habit of observing their habits. This was the way of them. Every morning a steam-launch came out from Greenwich, threading her way from pier to pier, picking up from each pier a little company of Orientals, and each man carried a basket of tools. By the time the steamer shot Westminster Bridge, half-a-hundred were aboard — silent, reserved, enigmatic — their faces turned always towards the east.

I lodged, as I have said, in a house at the foot of Buckingham Street in the Strand, for I loved the Thames, and liked to be near the infinite variety of her waterway. One of the windows of my sitting-room faced the street — faced the house where Peter the Great lived; the other looked over the Embankment Gardens to the river. On fine mornings I would watch for the smoke of the Orientals' steamer, which was my signal to start forth — down the steps to the little

## Power of Triple Flame Symbol 13

gravelled walk, up into Villiers Street, under the railway arch, along the Embankment, over Westminster Bridge, and by way of the causeway that runs in front of the seven sentinel blocks of St. Thomas's Hospital to the Albert Embankment, where the Archbishop's Palace stands frowning at the ill-bred streets that have sprung up around it.

There, where Lambeth pier dips into the river, I would linger, leaning over the parapet till the Orientals' steamer drew up alongside the landing-stage. That was her last stopping-place, and at this spot she always took nine passengers aboard. Seven were dressed alike — scarlet petticoats, scarlet leg-swathings, a scarlet garment about their shoulders, and upon their heads a small scarlet cap with ear-flaps.

The eighth was a girl.

The ninth was the Yellow Man.

The girl sat upon a stool in the middle of the deck embroidering in threads of



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gold upon a purple cloth ; her fingers were diligent, her eyes always downcast. The seven scarlet men squatted in a circle upon the deck about her feet.

The Yellow Man stood erect in the stern, his nervous, twitching hands clasped in front of him, his head raised, the silhouette of his eagle profile stern against the sky.

This last section of the steamer's voyage was short, just across the river to a wharf about a stone's throw above the terrace of the House of Commons, adjoining a great shed, a sort of dry dock, with massive doors abutting upon the river.

Many mornings I leaned over the parapet watching the steamer cleave her path through the waters ; many evenings I lingered there awaiting her return.

Then the Yellow Man, the seven scarlet guards, and the girl would ascend the wooden steps of Lambeth pier, walk in single file round the boundary wall of the old Parish Church, through the dingy

## Power of Triple Flame Symbol 15

streets, and so to their dwelling. As they passed me I observed that a design was tattooed upon each man's fore-arm just above the wrist.

The morning after I had received Mayfair's letter, the steamer left the pier without the girl. When the boat reached mid-stream, one of the seven waved his hand towards the shore. Peeping over the parapet, I discovered that his signal was answered from the window of a log hut standing at the end of the huge raft that is anchored just off the Embankment wall — ninety feet of rough planks, used as the headquarters of a London rowing club, and also as a lumber purgatory for old boats, old barrels, sprung oars, and tatterdemalion odds and ends. This signal, and the break in their daily routine, rousing my curiosity, I descended the steps, gained the raft, and picked my way over the planks (many of them had burst their bonds) to the log hut.

It was about the size of a small stable,

and lighted by two windows. Upon the door was painted a sign similar to that tattooed upon the left arms of the Orientals. While I was examining the symbol, which in form was like a triple flame, the sun suddenly burst through the clouds, and at the same moment the door was thrown open. At first I saw nothing but a magnificent purple cloth many yards in length, upon which the symbol blazed in threads of gold. The girl, who had been working upon this glorious cloth (she held in her hand a needle with a long thread of gold floating from it), screamed when she saw me, and slammed the door. It was a little oval, olive face, with heavy eyelids and thin, nerveless hair, the colour of flax, parted in the middle, and falling in wisps down either side. Somewhat disconcerted and a little ashamed, I re-ascended the steps and returned home.

The next morning the girl embarked as usual with her companions. When the vessel reached the wharf the artificers, the

Yellow Man, and five of the seven landed, the boat containing the girl and the other two scarlet guards being again headed for Lambeth steps. As the vessel drew near I observed that the men were quarrelling. They snapped their fingers in one another's faces, while their recriminations came to me shrilly over the water. The quarrel continued as they ascended from the landing-stage, the girl striving, but with ill success, to pacify them. Still bickering, they passed out of my sight.

I lingered upon the parapet perhaps for fifteen minutes, pondering. As I turned homewards I observed a young policeman, bare-headed, his helmet tucked under his arm, running at the top of his speed transversely across the main street. So rare a sight set my feet in hot pursuit, and soon brought me to a little gaping crowd of men and women peering through the railings of a garden, in which one of the Orientals was being dragged and pushed by two policemen at a trot up

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and down the gravel walk—limp, half-conscious, and moaning like an animal in pain. Suddenly the girl broke through the crowd and thrust a glass of salt and water into the policeman's hands; but before the liquid touched the man's lips his body was seized with convulsions, and he dropped heavily upon the pavement. The girl threw herself screaming at his feet, while the policemen wiped their faces with red handkerchiefs.

When the ambulance arrived, and they prepared to lift the body, her lamentations became pitiful. Something impelled me to advance. I bent over the huddled form, grasped her arm, and bade her rise. To my astonishment she obeyed, and slipping her small brown hand in mine, we joined the procession that wound slowly towards the hospital. The ambulance was wheeled into an inner room; we waited in the hall. Presently one of the staff popped his head round the door. 'Wife?' he asked, nodding at the girl, who crouched

## Power of Triple Flame Symbol 19

upon the floor with her face to the wall.

I shrugged my shoulders.

‘Bring her back in two hours’ time. We ’ll pull him through.’

I repeated the comforting words. Still sobbing, she scrambled to her feet, and we left the hospital together. Her body shivered, her fingers were quite cold. I spoke of the common sights of the quarter — the Houses of Parliament, the hospital, the distant dome of St. Paul’s. I spoke in my best manner, but my words might have been addressed to the flagstones.

We crossed Westminster Bridge and trudged northwards. When we reached Trafalgar Square a storm of rain broke upon us so violently that we hurried to the National Gallery portico for shelter. The spray still driving in our faces, I pushed open the doors and led this dripping, unhappy child within. She stared bewilderedly around till her eyes rested on Michael Angelo’s ‘Entombment of Christ.’

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‘They kill here too,’ she moaned.

I corrected her reading, but she did not listen. Turning from ‘The Entombment,’ she hurried through the rooms, avoiding the tragical subjects but lingering before every picture of Virgin or Madonna. Each she scrutinised, and when we reached the last of the Italians, she must begin all over again. What possessed her? In either cheek a red spot burned. Her lassitude had vanished; hope — a purpose — flamed in her eyes. What possessed her? Soon — soon was the question to be answered; but before that moment arrived I made the startling discovery that my companion was entirely ignorant of the Biblical narrative. To her the canvases were story pictures, and nothing else. Why, then, such interest in certain subjects? We were standing before Casimo Tura’s ‘Madonna Enthroned’ as I debated this question. Involuntarily I glanced at her figure, and straightway the question was answered. With that a wave

of pity for this potential little mother swept over me, and I stroked the small brown fingers that rested in mine. She looked up gratefully, and then flung out her hands with an antipathetic gesture at the bland, satisfied Mother in Casimo Tura's picture. I understood, and knowing I understood, she no longer sought to hide the thoughts that strove in her dawning intelligence. Through the rooms she hurried, rejecting one picture after another with an impatient shrug of the shoulders. None of those Mothers touched the human motherhood that was awakening within her: waxen inanities, passionless figures with hair carefully braided and plump, unsoiled hands—what had they in common with her degenerate body, tired face, and work-worn fingers? She swept along, her face white-drawn with expectation; and then suddenly, with a little joyful cry of surprise, she stopped before a Filippino Lippi in the Tuscan Room, the picture numbered two hundred and ninety-three.



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An introspective humility suffuses the face of this Madonna. She is thin and of a delicate habit. Her head is bent. The heavy eyes are sorrowful. She is too modest to enjoy her happiness; it is her destiny, her wonderful destiny, and she bears it with wonderment. About her head falls a white handkerchief, and, upon either side, wisps of thin hair straggle downwards to the unadorned neck. Pensive she sits in that quiet country where the trees are always in leaf and the lily ever in bloom.

My companion's wanderings had ceased. Here was her goal. She stood quite still, gazing ecstatically at this Madonna. A look of ineffable content overspread her face. That she was conscious of the resemblance between herself and Filippino Lippi's creation was evident, for she adjusted her thin hair till the wisps straggled down either side of her face, as if they had been so arranged by the painter's hands. Her face wore an unearthly radiance. Her lips framed a question.

## Power of Triple Flame Symbol 23

I told her the story of Jesus Christ. She listened with greedy attention. I followed no chronological order, but told an incident here and an incident there, just as they presented themselves to my memory, and so it followed that the account of the Wise Men who saw His star in the East came almost at the close of my narration.

‘Herod demanded of them where Christ should be born, and they replied, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet.”’

She started, her face became illumined as if the prophecy had awakened some memory, tapped some well in her nature. She threw her head back. Her eyes shone. Lassitude vanished. Her bosom rose with a joyful inspiration. She looked like a prisoner just reprieved, or a wife hearing of her soldier’s safety, or a poet to whom the great thought has just come.

I gazed at her with amazement. She was no longer the timid, despondent crea-

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ture of the past two hours, and it was a firm, strenuous hand that now clutched mine. From that moment she took the initiative. We left the gallery, descended the steps, crossed Trafalgar Square, and returned to the hospital. The clock struck twelve.

‘He waits for me,’ she said as the last stroke died away; ‘my husband is well again.’

A woman in hysterics was being carried into the hospital as we ascended the steps. In the outer hall a man groaned from a camp bedstead. Within, seated upon a form, ashamed and dejected, was her husband.

She ran forward with outstretched arms and whispered in his ear.

I addressed the Captain of the Scarlet Seven, whose attentions to the wife had been the cause of the husband’s attempt at suicide. He was leaning carelessly against the whitewashed wall, rolling a cigarette. I upbraided him in English,

## Power of Triple Flame Symbol 25

but he only shook his head, smiled, and showed white teeth, whereupon I walked into the adjoining room and into a group of students.

‘Can anybody here speak Hindustani?’ I asked.

One of them nodded. Later I learned that he was a Parsee.

‘Would you be so good as to tell a Hindoo in the next room that he’s a blackguard?’

‘With pleasure.’ He was more muscular than the generality of Parsees.

The philanderer was puffing rings of tobacco smoke towards the ceiling as we approached. The Parsee student was about to address him, when he caught sight of the triple flame symbol tattooed upon the man’s arm. He started, his face assumed a peculiar gravity; then he collected the girl, the husband, and the philanderer around him. A monologue from the Parsee followed. Its purport I did not know at the time, although later

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events gave me the clue. Enough to say now that finally lover, husband, and wife shook hands amicably, and, having made obeisance to me, left the hospital. The girl ran back when they reached the door, seized my hand and kissed it half a dozen times. I turned inquiringly to the Parsee student.

He had disappeared.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST EDITOR OF "THE BEE"

WHEN I reached home that night another letter from Mayfair awaited me, brief but to the point. It was dated from Chamonix. 'I've set my heart upon making you editor of the new paper,' he wrote, 'but the Little Mother is a kittle-kattle creature who must be humoured. We leave for Martigny on Friday morning. You should meet us there *by chance*. I mean it! Don't delay!'

The House had risen. It was the dull-est month of the year. I had gone without holiday for eighteen months, and — and this escapade might prove profitable. I decided on the journey. My letter to Mayfair also gave an account of the poisoning and the National Gallery incident, but I did not mention the log hut

## 28      The Enchanted Stone

on the raft or my surprise visit to its occupant.

Before starting it occurred to me that it might be well to learn something about my prospective employer. So I walked down to the office of a friendly evening newspaper and sent up my card to the editor, who was by way of being my friend and a shining light of that modern school which preserves biographical gossip about eminent personages of the moment. He gave me the freedom of the office library, and there in a stodgy volume I found this extract from an American newspaper :

### ‘THE RICHEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD AND THE RAREST CRANK.

‘Madame de Gruchy’s fortune,’ the extract ran, ‘tots up to £10,000,000 sterling, a sum only exceeded by Li Hung Chang, whose money has been made in rice-growing and money-lending. She is a brainy woman, and owns the famous de Gruchy mine in Western Australia, whose output

exceeds all the other Australian mines put together. The Little Mother (that's her pet name) is the relict of Mr. Isidore de Gruchy, who, in the dear dead days, ran a chemist's shop in Guernsey, Channel Islands. The basis of his fortune (he left more than five millions sterling) was the discovery of the *De Gruchy Depilatory Paste*, which removes the beard without the aid of a razor. You smear it on, the paste does the rest. That Madame de Gruchy in ten years has doubled her fortune is a striking testimony to her remarkable financial genius. She is the

#### RICHEST CRANK IN THE WORLD

and she is not afraid of spending money to indulge a whim. Neither does she object to changing her mind. She is nuts on religion and has lived through and out-lived a hundred beliefs. From Anglicanism to Unitarianism, from Unitarianism to Agnosticism, from Agnosticism to Deism, from Deism to Theosophy, from Theoso-



phy to Spiritualism, from Spiritualism to — ah ! who shall say which fold will next receive the millions and the enthusiasms of this remarkable sheep? Each ism to which the Little Mother has temporarily affiliated herself has risen up and blessed her munificence. Her idea of attracting righteous young men of parts to Unitarian pulpits by investment of a sum in Consols, sufficient to give twenty of them £1000 a year, signalled her connection with the Unitarians. Her year of Deism was marked by even greater enterprise, for she delivered to every householder in the four great cities of the United Kingdom whose rental exceeded £100 a year a copy of Huxley's Romanes lecture called *Evolution and Ethics*. With boundless wealth almost anything is possible. We await with interest other extravagances to be born of Madame de Gruchy's enthusiasms. Her mind has been compared to a chest of drawers which, one by one, she steadily fills and closes. *On dit* the drawer con-

taining Madame de Gruchy's theosophical experiences is about to be closed with a bang.'

Two days later, at nine o'clock in the morning, I stood on the balcony of the Hôtel de France at Chamonix. As I leaned over the balustrade two carriages swept from the grounds of the hotel opposite, and rolled away in the direction of Martigny. The first contained a little middle-aged woman whose eyes were fixed upon the summit of Mont Blanc. By her side sat a maid, and on the facing seat—Mayfair.

The second vehicle carried four young men, tall, serious, black-coated, who wore mutton-chop whiskers. They were settling themselves to sleep.

I beckoned to the *concierge*.

'At what hour does Madame de Gruchy reach Martigny?'

'About half-past seven this evening,' he answered.

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Within quarter of an hour I had paid my small bill and was driving up the wide valley.

The road at the top of the Tête Noir was lined with empty carriages, whose occupants were lunching or sleeping in the large cool rooms of the hotel. The shafts of the vehicles were turned back against the drivers' seats, the cushions were littered with wraps and Tauchnitz novels. Mosquitoes and great multi-coloured butterflies darted and fluttered through the hot air. The only sound that struck upon the ear was the scraping of the horses' feet upon the cobblestones of the long shed where they stood, with heads hitched by old ropes to worm-eaten beams.

I walked down the street, peering through the low windows of the hotel, and ere long espied the de Gruchy party. They had finished their meal and the Little Mother was reading aloud. Hers was a beautiful voice — rich, full, and deep. She read without effort and with-

out any attempt at dramatic characterisation. The sentences, as they fell from her lips, rose and became one with the air and the sunshine. The four orphans, who had sleek black hair and the tired look of folk whose brains have been overtaxed, listened attentively but dully to the reading.

Mayfair's roving eye caught mine. A smile flitted across his face, but he made no sign of recognition. He seemed bored. I watched him yawn, drum with his finger upon the table, and throw a piece of banana to a dog.

The reading continued. I drew near to listen. The cadences of that rich voice fell soothingly upon my ears.

'Now in writing beneath the cloudless peace of the snows of Chamonix,' she read, 'what must be the really final words of the book which their beauty inspired and their strength guided, I am able, with yet happier and calmer heart than ever heretofore, to enforce its simplest assurance

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of Faith, that the knowledge of what is beautiful leads on, and is the first step to the knowledge of the things which are lovely and of good report; and that the laws, the life, and the joy of Beauty, in the material world of God, are as eternal and sacred parts of His creation as ——' At this point Mayfair surreptitiously dipped a corner of his handkerchief into a confection of red-currants, pressed the linen to his face, rose, and with an incoherent apology, stepped out of the window into the street, and hurried to the shed where the lazy little steeds stood.

I followed, and found him lying at full length in a manger.

'Well, old horse!' he cried as I advanced. 'Did n't you admire my method of escape? Faugh! Ruskin after luncheon on a summer day! It's intolerable! I want to live things, not read about 'em. Did you ever see such a serious family? What on earth am I doing in that galley? Great Scott!'

He swung himself out of the manger.  
'And now tell me everything.'

'Strange, very strange,' was his comment when I had finished. 'There's something big afoot. It will make a splendid send-off for the new paper. You must repeat the yarn to the Little Mother — which brings me to practicalities. The difficulty is a scheme — a scheme that she will enthuse about. Also, I want to make your position sure.'

'I'm in your hands,' I answered, 'but the roundabout method does n't commend itself to me. Why should n't I write to her?'

'Oh, hear him talk! No, no! Now just listen. You go straight away to Mürren, and take up your quarters at the Jungfrau Hotel. Await us there. I'll manage the introductions. Hullo! she's signalling for me. Well, good-bye for the present.'

He ran gaily from the stable to receive the condolences of his party — smilingly,

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easily, as if they had been deserved. Quarter of an hour later their vehicles were crawling down the road, the horses' heads nodding towards Martigny.

I made my way by easy stages to Mürren, and found a bedroom at the Jungfrau Hotel with some difficulty, as the whole of the first floor was reserved for Madame de Gruchy. The Jungfrau is an inn of simple pretensions, patronised chiefly by amiable, ill-dressed Swiss and German families. The de Gruchy party arrived the day after my arrival.

My dinner-place was at the dwindling end of one of the long tables, and, as luck would have it, the de Gruchy family were assigned to the contiguous seats.

I judged Madame de Gruchy to be between sixty and sixty-five. As a girl she must have been attractive, with the attraction of a fresh complexion and a nice mind. Even now there was a trace of rose-colour in the lined, worn face. The hair was gray, smoothed evenly on either side of

the head, upon which a cheap cap, dotted with imitation pearls, was placed somewhat askew. Her black dress was plain and ill-fitting, the work, no doubt, of a St. Wees dressmaker. She squandered her fortune, but never upon herself.

When the de Gruchy party entered the dining-room Mayfair sprang towards me with outstretched hands and smiling eyes. Presentations followed, when, to my astonishment, he introduced the orphans as Mr. Emerson, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Huxley, and Mr. Ruskin; but I kept my countenance, and, in response to an intimation from Madame de Gruchy, was soon voluble on the subject of the Orientals.

• • • • •  
 Later, when Mayfair and I sat together upon the balcony, I asked why he had introduced the orphans as Mr. Emerson, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Huxley, and Mr. Ruskin.

‘Why? Because those are their names,’ he replied.



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‘Baptismally?’

‘Certainly. That was one of the Little Mother’s youthful vagaries. Long ago she selected four nameless babies from four workhouses, mothered them, and christened them Emerson, Gladstone, Huxley, and Ruskin. When the children grew up she gave to each the training of a specialist in the branch of knowledge that answers to his name—ethics, politics, science, and art. The four are tip-top specialists, crammed with facts to the top of their heads. They’re a quartet of human bees who have spent their early years sipping at the choicest flowers of knowledge. The time has now come to distribute from their storehouse. That’s where you come in.’

‘I! How?’

‘From a chance remark I made to the Little Mother on the drive from Chamonix. I’m always making chance remarks by which other people profit. We were speaking of the orphans, and

I struck upon the simile about the bees, and suggested that a newspaper was the best means of distributing the honey of their wisdom. Straightway she began to quiver with enthusiasm. A notion was being born in her fertile brain. The symptoms were familiar to me. I waited.

'The idea took a quarter of an hour to germinate, but when she spoke it was ripe indeed. The new paper should be called *The Bee*, a weekly paper, or rather a combination of four papers, wherein each orphan would sub-edit a section devoted to his own particular subject. I suggested that a paper given over entirely to ethics, politics, science, and art might be a trifle dull, whereupon she commanded me to fill the gap by editing a fifth section. I selected Society — my name suggested the notion — and further proposed that as none of us knew anything at all about journalism, it would be well to have some responsible person as general editor, who would keep us in order. Well, you're a

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responsible person, and I shall be very glad to work under you. Why don't you look pleased?'

'It's too alarming,' I answered; 'I could not offer my services uninvited. The overtures must come from Madame de Gruchy, and then there are other engagements which I — I — should not feel justified in relinquishing.'

'Oh, the money's all right. She'll give a thousand a year to a good man. Don't worry. You just sit tight. The Little Mother will observe you during the next week, and then, backed by my insidious tongue, I'll eat my head if you are n't editor of *The Bee* before the month's out.'

With that he strolled off to the billiard room at the Hôtel des Alpes, and I sat there under the high mountains until bedtime, reflecting upon the chances and changes of life.

During the next few days the orphans (under instructions from the Little

Mother, Mayfair said) made friendly advances to me. They were not exhilarating companions, but I have a weakness for amateur learning, and by judiciously leading the conversation to the particular subject of my particular companion of the moment, I spent many instructive half-hours. They saw clearly, but their vision was limited. The pastures that lay on either side of the walled route along which their minds travelled had no interest for them. They were content to be as they were. They had learnt their lesson.

I am afraid I did not shine during that period, so self-conscious was I under the ceaseless scrutiny of the Little Mother's green eyes. The crisis came with the seventh day.

Early one morning I descended to Lauterbrunnen, took the train up the mountain side to the Little Scheideck, purposing a return to the valley on foot. High on my left the Eiger, the Mönch,

and the Jungfrau lounged into the clouds. Between us yawned the deep ravine which gulps avalanches. The solemnity of this region of eternal snow awed me into a mood more serious than usual. Yet all around was pastoral nature,—simple, kindly, sweet. The air was fragrant with a thousand scents. At my feet larkspur, wild orchids, and mountain roses grew. Sheep bells tinkled on the hills. Young life abounded. And just then, when the loveliness of these things had captivated me, the rich silence was marred by the thunder of an avalanche hurling downwards like a shattered world. It was so unexpected that I sprang back, and as I did so, somebody uttered these words, ‘It is the voice of God.’

I turned, to find Madame de Gruchy by my side. Her eyes were fixed upon the mountain top.

‘God is nature, and nature is God,’ she said in a reverent whisper. ‘The spring is the clothing in which He wraps Him-

self for our delight. He reveals Himself in many ways—in the colour of the gentian and the lily, and in the thunder of His avalanches. The mountains know Him. They remember His command, "Tarry thou till I come," and they wait patiently. What other revelation do we need?'

Fortunately my companion did not expect an answer. She stood for a minute gazing upon the heights, her deep chest rising and falling with emotion; then, turning to me, she looked earnestly at my perturbed face and said, 'I am a little tired. May I have the assistance of your arm?'

Thus we descended to Lauterbrunnen. She encouraged me to talk, and I, being at heart a man of sentiment, became almost confidential. Then she spoke of the paper she purposed founding, and by the time we came in sight of the funicular railway that climbs to Mürren I had been offered, and had accepted, the editorship

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of *The Bee*. Still I did not feel altogether happy. I am a plain man with an honest liking for realities, and here was I acting as if I were a Celebrity at Home in the *Arabian Nights*.

## CHAPTER IV

### I SEE THE ENCHANTED STONE

**I**N the first number of *The Bee* I printed an account of the daily journeyings of the Orientals upon Thames. That article had far-reaching consequences. It brought the Yellow Man into my life, and in this way.

It was the morning of press day of the second number. Among the manuscripts which arrived by the early post was one in a queer square handwriting, and redolent with a pungent Eastern perfume. It was written in hyperbolic language and began with these words — ‘Om! Salutation to the Revered and Sublime White Queen, whose arms encircle the globe,’ and ended with the cryptic peroration — ‘I am not inconsiderate, like the grass-eating animals. I will repay. The mountains may be overthrown, but I, O Queen,



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will not rest till I regain the Desire of the Nations.'

The body of the manuscript contained, so far as I gathered in a hurried perusal, a demand that a certain gem, described as The Enchanted Stone, which was about to be presented to the Queen by the Rajah of Pepperthala, should be restored to the writer, who proclaimed himself the life-custodian of the jewel. Further, the communication stated that the writer would call upon me that afternoon at four o'clock. It was unsigned, but at the foot was stamped the triple flame symbol.

My eyes were opened at their widest when the tape machine which stands in the corner of my room began to tick. As it was unusual for news to be sent through at such an early hour, I hastened to the instrument. The tape coiled forth, and I spelled out the following:—

'Prince of Wales has just left Marlborough House to call upon the Rajah

of Pepperthala, who is staying at Buckingham Palace, by H. M.'s invitation.'

That was a remarkable item of news in itself, to say nothing of the coincidence. Our last distinguished Indian visitor, I knew, had been lodged in the Gloucester Road. Why, then, should the Rajah of Pepperthala, the broken-down ruler of a bankrupt feudatory State in Northern India, be housed at Buckingham Palace? It being press day, I was not able to give any time to the affair, so I sent the manuscript and the news item to Mayfair, who worked in the room at the end of the passage, asking him to make investigations and to let me know the result before four o'clock.

The strain of the day lasted well into the afternoon, and it was half-past three before I found time to read carefully the scented manuscript and Mayfair's comments upon it. I had just finished a second perusal when a card was brought to me bearing upon it nothing but the

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triple flame symbol. I glanced at the clock. The hands pointed to four.

I told the messenger to show the stranger into my ante-room and to ask Mr. Mayfair to see me at once.

‘Hush,’ I whispered when Mayfair appeared. ‘He’s in there,’ indicating the adjoining chamber. ‘Sit at my desk and pretend to be writing. Listen attentively, but don’t speak.’

The clock struck four. I threw open the door of the ante-room. It was the Yellow Man, who came forward, lightly and noiselessly, with the grace of a free animal. The crown of his head, from which the turban had been removed, resembled a yellow billiard ball. The slight nostrils and the thin lips quivered with excitement.

‘You have read my statement?’ he said with something of defiance.

I nodded an affirmative.

‘And you will put my words into your paper?’

I shrugged my shoulders. ‘Our space is limited. Besides ——’

He strode to my side. 'I judge men,' he said in a tone of magnificent assurance. 'As to you, you delight to serve the Lord of all the Worlds.'

'Really!' I began.

'Yet,' he swept on, 'you will hinder the revelation the Lord of all the Worlds has promised to mankind.'

'Do you refer to me or to the paper?' I asked gently. It was clear I had to deal with a religious fanatic.

'Yours is a great journal,' he continued, ignoring my question. 'You are the editor. You wield power. You are not rich. Procure for me *The Enchanted Stone* and I will give you two, three, five thousand pounds.'

With that he drew from an inner pocket a bundle of bank notes and flung them upon the table. They were for £1000 each, and undoubtedly genuine.

'Few English newspapers can be bribed,' I said haughtily, 'and *The Bee* happens to be of the majority. Now let us under-

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stand each other. I gather from a hasty reading of the document you have been good enough to send me, that the Rajah of Pepperthala, who is now staying at Buckingham Palace by Her Majesty's invitation, has in his possession a valuable jewel known as The Enchanted Stone, which you assert is your property, you being the official custodian of the gem. You also state that the said stone has brought nothing but trouble and disaster to its various owners, and that the present titular proprietor has, in spite of your vehement protestations, determined to present this ill-omened thing to Her Majesty, and that he has travelled to England for that purpose. Further, you are so anxious to get possession of the gem as to offer me a bribe of £5000 if I succeed in restoring it to you. Now, it is not unreasonable that I should ask this question — Are you prepared to substantiate your claim? For all I know, the gem has been already handed over to Her Majesty, and it is at

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this moment lodged in the Tower with the other Regalia. I'm afraid I could not consent to steal a Crown jewel, even for a bribe of £5000.'

'To restore, not to steal,' he interposed quickly.

I laughed contemptuously. Then his demeanour changed. He shrank into himself, the long lashes fell across his eyes, his head drooped upon his breast, and he cried in a broken voice, 'How long, O Lord, how long? I am as one standing upon the housetops, trying to grasp the stars of heaven.'

My heart softened. 'Convince us of your good faith,' I said, 'and I will see what can be done. In the meantime we will insert a paragraph that may arouse public interest.'

With that I threw open the door of the ante-room, as a hint that the interview was ended.

The chamber faced the west. The fog which hung about the streets was of that

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wreathy, fantastic character that makes potential mysteries of chimney-pots, way-farers, and telegraph posts. As I threw open the door a heavy cloud was just rolling away from the setting sun. For one moment the sun glared like an angry eye, a feather of cloud dancing impishly over its surface; then another, a storm-scud, swept up, like a puff of gun-fire from a distant coast. The good round light went out, and in its place came gloom and the shadows of night. Then the storm-scud went off before a wind, and the sun hung above the horizon in a blaze of good-night splendour.

What happened next was begun and ended in the space of three seconds. A ripple of low laughter fell upon my ears. Turning swiftly, I observed Mayfair trying, with poor success, to preserve his gravity. Seeking for the cause, I found it in the Yellow Man, who had fallen upon his knees with long arms raised reverently towards the sun, that shone full

upon his mobile face. His head bobbed in unison to a torrent of words in some unknown tongue that broke from his lips. It was the back of the man's nodding head that moved Mayfair to mirth. Had he seen his face as I saw it—so sad, so poignant—he would have felt no inclination to laugh. It moved me strangely, and then in a flash my sympathy was changed to horror, and I was rushing across the room to where Mayfair sat still laughing, but now desperately.

I caught the Yellow Man's arm as the dagger gleamed downwards in a sharp, swift stroke, and so lessened the force of the blow, but I was not in time to save the boy. Blood spurted from the wound, and he fell forward upon his face.

'You devil,' I cried, seizing the hand that still held the dagger; but he slipped from my grasp like an eel and ran. I let him go, for Mayfair had fainted and needed me. His shirt was stained with blood. I stanchd the flow, bound up



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the wound as well as my knowledge of surgery permitted, laid him down at full length upon the floor, and then considered. At all costs the affair must be hushed up. I wrote a note explaining the nature of the injury, then rang the bell, and met the messenger outside the room.

‘Take this letter to Dr. Eastern,’ I said. ‘Bring him back with you.’

Then I locked the door and waited. In a little Mayfair moved, raising himself upon one elbow. ‘What, where——?’

‘Be quiet, there’s a dear fellow,’ I whispered.

‘O, I remember,’ he said, gazing curiously at the stained bandages. ‘I’m peppered, zounds, a dog, a cat, to scratch a man to death. A braggart—how does it go? O—!’ He fainted again.

By the time Eastern arrived I had decided upon my course of action. ‘You know me,’ I said. ‘It was an accident. I take all responsibility. It’s an un-

fortunate business, and I want it to be kept quiet.'

Eastern smiled. 'It's only a flesh wound,' he said after a brief examination.

'Can he be moved?' I asked.

'Oh yes.'

In half an hour Mayfair was able to walk about the room. I decided to remove him at once, and, without attracting attention, helped him downstairs to a cab. I gave the driver the address of my rooms.

'No, no,' he whispered, 'take me home.'

'To The Albany?' I asked. He nodded.

There I left him without misgivings in charge of his venerable but most motherly housekeeper. In the hurried journey back to the office the events of the day pattered through my brain, and the long fingers of imagination stretched before me, pointing to strange and fantastic developments. I heard nothing, saw nothing, as we raced

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through the lighted streets, except a news-boy who flashed an eager, hatchet face through the cab window. I bought a halfpenny sheet.

Arrived at the office I chipped a dark stain from the wood-work of the chair in which Mayfair had been sitting, and then carefully studied the prospect from the window. Night had descended upon the fog. The opposite houses were undistinguishable. Good! The thing remained our secret. Human eye could never penetrate that density. I could not even see the outline of the stone parapet that encircled the balcony in front of my windows.

Turning away, the evening paper I had purchased caught my eye. The front page contained half a column about the visit of the Rajah of Pepperthala. It was invertebrate stuff, with an account of the decay of the State of Pepperthala and a disquisition on the personality of its ruler. As to the reason of the Rajah's visit to

England the report was silent. For me the interest of the account kernelled in the last paragraph.

It was to the effect that the Rajah had been accompanied to England by Mr. Edward Kettle, 'so well known a few years back in connection with Colonial politics, who is now acting as cicerone and interpreter to the Rajah of Pepperthala.'

Now, I knew something about Mr. Kettle — something not quite creditable to that gentleman — in connection with a certain transfer of Government land, which I had kept close in that sanctuary of the memory reserved for the bad deeds of others. My forbearance made me the victim of repeated offers of service from Kettle. The opportunity had now arrived. I determined to go down at once to Buckingham Palace and claim from him a slight fulfilment of his many promises.

As an acquaintance of Edward Kettle's I found no difficulty in obtaining admit-

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tance to the Palace. The porter left me in a large room swathed in brown holland. In a few minutes he returned. Mr. Kettle was dressing for dinner and could not see me. I wrote three words on a card, slipped it into an envelope and persuaded the servant to repeat his journey. . . . This time I was more successful. Mr. Kettle would see me, and at once.

The Rajah of Pepperthala occupied a suite of rooms on the first floor. The night was too dark for me to locate the apartment into which I was shown, but I imagine it looked out upon the gardens that extend to Grosvenor Place. The minutes passed. I grew impatient. Somebody moved in the next room, then Kettle's voice reached me giving instructions to a servant. 'A plague on this man,' said I, and without more ado threw open the door that separated us. Edward Kettle was standing before the fire paring his nails. Oiled hair, curled moustache, liquid eyes, short putty figure, a velvet

collar to his dining-coat ; he was the same fat dandy — unchanged, unregenerate. I came to the point at once.

‘Kettle,’ I said, ‘I want to have some conversation with the Rajah of Pepperthala, and I should be much obliged if you would let me have a peep at a certain valuable, known to fame as The Enchanted Stone.’

He looked up quickly, smiled uneasily, and flicked a crumb from his sleeve.

‘Such an interview, my dear fellow, is quite *ultra vires*. I have already refused some of the smartest people in London. As to what you call The Enchanted Stone, I don’t know what you mean. It’s *caviare* to me, quite *caviare*,’ he repeated, fumbling nervously with his gold toothpick.

I caught him by the arm (he reeked of patchouli) and whispered something in his ear. I was not in a mood to bandy words with the fellow, who rolled his foolish foreign tags round his tongue as if he were a bear with a piece of honeycomb. He shrank from me, spreading his hands

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between us. 'All right,' he stuttered, breaking back to the accent of other days. 'Play fair!'

Observing the amusement I made no effort to conceal, he recovered himself.

'What you require is *difficile*,' he said sententiously. 'The old fellow is mad with rum and disease. Really I dare n't present him to a stranger. Stop! I have an idea *bien trouvé!*' he cried, and with that he suddenly turned down the gas. 'The old fellow is in the next room alone. You sit here on line with the door. I'll open it on the pretence of speaking to him. That is your opportunity, *n'est ce pas?* But don't utter a sound. And if he catches sight of you, make yourself scarce. *Comprenez vous?* He's like a tiger with that confounded gem.'

I promised to remain perfectly still. Cautiously he opened the door.

I saw a broadly-built man, with dusky face, long matted hair, and a bull neck, upon which the skin folded itself in ridges.

Over his shoulders a blanket was thrown. He was fondling and patting a smooth oval thing the size of a cocoanut, but the colour was the colour of gold. When the door opened he grabbed the golden object to his chest, and by a rapid movement of his broad shoulders concealed it beneath the blanket. That was all I saw of the Rajah of Pepperthala — poor tamed creature, lonely and despised, whose ancestors had been monarchs of broad lands, with power to kill, and in their hands the keys of palaces and temples and vaults heaped with treasure.

Kettle closed the door. He was quite pale.

‘You have seen him,’ he whispered, ‘and I’m sure you ought to be infernally obliged to me; and, my boy, you’ve also seen the case that contains the blessed stone. Oh, don’t ask me anything further! This Desire of the Nations, as they call it, is driving me mad, *absit omen*. I’ll just tell you one thing,’ he added, sinking his



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voice to a whisper, 'and you may repeat it to whoever gets hold of the blessed thing — *caveat emptor*. That's what I say. Good-night. Stay, I'll see you to the door.'

The adventures of the day had given me materials for a lively article. I wandered up Constitution Hill, arranging the paragraphs in my mind, thence into Hyde Park, and by the time I had travelled as far as the Marble Arch and back again to Hyde Park Corner, the article was clamouring to be written. So I hastened down Grosvenor Place, purposing to take the train from Victoria to Charing Cross.

The fog had become so much denser during the last hour, that I was quite glad to have the friendly wall of Buckingham Palace Gardens as a guide. With my left hand trailing against it, I slowly and cautiously groped my way till I drew near the spot where Grosvenor Place turns sharply round to the left into little Grosvenor Place. There an extraordinary ad-

venture befell me. At this point, where the pavement narrows, I was crouching under the lee of the wall to remove myself as far as possible from a brilliantly-lamped Parcels Post van that came rattling through the fog, when suddenly a man dropped upon me from the top of the wall. He doubled himself up as he fell, alighting gracefully upon my head, enveloping me as if he were an extinguisher and I a candle. At the same time a metal vessel clanged upon the pavement, while a smaller object struck sharply against my foot.

I tumbled incontinently upon the flags, while the stranger, recovering himself while I was still blinking, picked up the metal vessel, which I perceived had burst open, and disappeared into the fog.

I blinked with amazement. It was impossible to mistake that tall yellow figure.

As I lay prone upon the moist pavement trying to collect my wits, there fell

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upon the hushed air, from the direction of the Palace, an eerie wail. Then I heard shouts in the garden, a dog's deep bay, and a voice crying, 'Quick! here's the ladder.'

That narrow slip of pavement, where I sat cross-legged like a Buddha, was clearly no place for me. Mechanically I picked up the object that had struck against my foot, slipped it into my pocket, and made for Victoria Station at a double.

I examined this object in the dim light of a third-class carriage. It was irregular in form, heavy as iron, dull as a blackened boot before the polishing brush, about the size of a child's clenched fist, and apparently quite valueless. Oddly enough, its form was familiar, but memory was laggard.

Brooding over the events of the day, I reached my rooms, and made, as usual, for the writing-table where my letters were placed.

Ah! Of course! How stupid!

Lying upon a bundle of proofs was the counterpart of the lump of metal I had found — my old familiar paper-weight.

Removing the lamp-shade, I examined and compared them. One was a facsimile of the other, and yet not quite. There was just the difference between them that there is between a counterfeit and a genuine piece of money. The outline of my paper-weight was a little blurred, the figuration a touch less delicate, the hue not quite such a dull black. Under this careful scrutiny I detected in my paper-weight a peculiarity that had escaped my notice before. I have said that in form it was like a child's clenched fist; well, on the back of the hand, between wrist and knuckles, I perceived a design like the diaper upon a table-cloth, or like the Widmanstätten figures upon a piece of meteoric iron — such a specimen, for example, as that found in South Carolina, and now preserved in the Museum of Practical Geology in Jermyn Street.

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The design upon the paper-weight stone was clouded and blurred, but upon the *other* it stood out bold and distinct.

That design was in the form of a triple flame.

‘Again!’ I soliloquised, ‘again!’

‘What is the history of your paper-weight? How did you obtain it?’ I asked myself.

Soon memory had felt back to an Easter I spent with my Aunt Anna at Winchelsea. She was a dear, generous, superstitious old soul, with a passion for bestowing upon her nephews and nieces useless knick-knacks possessing, she fondly believed, healing qualities. This stone, she assured me, was a specific for sore eyes. It had been presented to her in gratitude by a lone Hindoo, whom she had cured of a common but trifling ailment. Aunt Anna had met the man at Winchelsea, where his master, a retired Indian official, had taken a house for the summer. As my eyes were exceptionally

strong, I had utilised the gift as a paper-weight.

I compared the two again. Mine was clearly a copy of the other. What did it mean? How explain these coincidences following fast upon each other? Fortunately for my peace of mind it was necessary for me to set to work at once, and when the article was finished I was too tired for anything but sleep.

When I awoke, considerably after my usual hour, the sun was shining upon the table, and I observed, in the drowsy, semi-conscious way we note things at the first moment of waking, that soon the broad white beam of sunlight streaming through the window would fall upon the stone. Then I fell asleep again. When I re-awoke, it lay full in the glare of the sunshine. I gazed sleepily, too lazy even to turn my head away, till gradually it dawned upon me that I had been mistaken in supposing that the stone was black. Its colour was red. I rubbed my

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eyes and sat up in bed. Yes, the stone was certainly red—a dark, heavy red. And yet as I looked, it became clear to me that the stone was by no means a dark red. It was a *living red*, the colour of blood. I jumped from my bed and touched the thing with my forefinger. It burnt.

I am not a nervous man, but I confess to feeling startled. I had been working and worrying over much of late, and Nature, I knew, sometimes sent her warnings through odd channels. But then, why should the stone burn me? I composed myself, bathed and dressed leisurely, dismissing with an effort the subject from my mind. Half an hour passed. I looked again. The stone stood in the shade, and was quite black—as black as a mourning hat-band.

Could . . .? Could . . .? I lifted the stone (it was moist to the touch) and again placed it in the centre of the beam of light.

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The rays of the sun concentrated themselves upon its surface, and, as the thing warmed, the deep black of its normal condition gave place to a dull red. Presently the red changed into a glow like a November sunset, then to a white heat, and there before me lay the thing palpitating and panting as if it were alive. With the point of my penknife I pushed it farther into the light, and even as I looked — *it moved.*

I cut two thin strips of paper and placed them upon the table at either side of the stone. Then I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, one of the strips of paper was untouched. The other was gone — burnt. Its charred ends were curled up an inch behind the stone.

What did it mean? A stone that glowed, and pulsed, and moved when placed in the sun! A stone that the sun had power to vivify! What did it mean?

The sun!! The events of yesterday swept back on me — the Yellow Man, his



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anxiety to procure the gem, his adoration of the setting sun. The sun again!

I pressed my hands to my head. The voice of a paper-seller in the street below cut raucously into my thoughts — ‘Robbery at Buckingham Palace. Strange Rumours.’

I ran to the window. A cab drew up at my door. In another moment Mayfair staggered into the room.

‘Madman!’ I cried, ‘to leave your bed.’

‘Splendid!’ he shouted, gazing at me, his eyes shining congratulation. Then he whispered, ‘*Where is it?*’

‘Where is what?’ I asked.

Trembling with delight, he grasped my hand again. ‘Of course you must flee the country. Fishing smack — captain bribed — midnight landing on the French coast.’

‘Do be serious,’ I said, ‘you make me nervous.’

‘Capital!’ he screamed. ‘Your handling of the affair is masterly. Of course

you know,' he added, 'that the Rajah and Kettle were found gagged and bound, and Kettle has informed Scotland Yard that you ——'

As the words left his lips Mayfair reeled against me, and would have fallen had I not caught him in my arms.

Although he did not actually faint, the boy was so weak, he looked so ill, that I determined to keep him under my roof, and after a deal of persuasion I induced him to undress and get into my bed, where I left him while I breakfasted. When I returned he was asleep.

Should I tell him of the events of last night? Should I tell him of the extraordinary character of the stone I had found in Grosvenor Place, that—that it was enchanted? *Enchanted! Enchanted Stone!* Why, that was the phrase used by the Yellow Man. Could this piece of ore that had come so mysteriously into my possession be the Thing which the Rajah of Pepperthala had brought to

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England, and which the Yellow Man was so ardent to acquire?

Was that black thing lying there beside my paper-weight the Enchanted Stone?

‘Robbery at Buckingham Palace. Strange Rumours.’ Beneath my very windows these frightening head-lines were now being cried.

Mayfair still slept. I dropped the Thing into my pocket and hurried from the house.

One thought shone clear in my brain — that I must be rid of it without delay. But how? Restore it to the Rajah I dare not. Who would believe my yarn that the stone had fallen at my feet from the clouds on a foggy night in Grosvenor Place? Could I hand it to the Yellow Man, and earn the £5000? Impossible. Oh, quite impossible!

As I drew near the office I found the lamps lighted. The fog was denser even than on the previous day, a furtive look

played over the hall porter's face, and the messenger boys were beaming with suppressed excitement. When I reached my room I observed with consternation that some sort of a search had been made. The papers on my desk were disarranged, and there were muddy boot-marks upon the floor.

I locked the door, turned down the gas, and threw myself upon the sofa. What on earth was I to do with the wretched thing? Some sort of decision must be made immediately. The room was in semi-darkness. Fog lurked in the corners. The leaping fire threw fantastic reflections upon the window-pane. That was the sole illumination.

As I lay there, thinking, thinking, a sound came to me through the darkness like a cat scratching upon the glass. Raising myself upon my elbow, I looked hard at the window whence the noise proceeded, and as I stared, a face, a thin yellow face, with keen eyes and a restless

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mouth, shaped itself out of the surrounding gloom.

For a moment we stared at one another. Then an idea leapt into my mind. Slowly I rose from the sofa, lifted the stone from my coat pocket and placed it upon the table within a foot of the window.

The thin scratch of a diamond cutting through glass fell upon my ear, then a pane was withdrawn, and through the opening a long yellow hand extended itself towards the stone, seized it, and withdrew into the fog. I waited breathlessly for the pane to be replaced, but instead, five banknotes fluttered through the opening and fell upon the table. Then the glass returned suddenly into position and the face disappeared from behind the window. The notes were stamped £1000 each.

## CHAPTER V

### MAYFAIR MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE SACRED VALLEY MATRON

**B**EING a methodical man, I noted the numbers of the notes, and was in the act of writing the last figure when a card was handed to me. It bore the name of Inspector Dove, and in the lower left-hand corner the words 'Scotland Yard.'

An elderly, precise-featured man entered the room. I motioned him to a chair, but an apologetic gesture indicated that he preferred to stand. He spoke with a slight stammer.

'I am authorised to offer you an apology,' he began, inclining his head the fraction of an angle, 'for our p-pre-mature action in searching this apartment. The order was given under a misunderstanding, as we have been informed that

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on your departure from B-uckingham Palace, Mr. Kettle himself accompanied you downstairs, and that the door was opened and closed b-behind you by one of the attendants.'

I begged him to forget the affair, and was relieved to find, from some further questions I ventured, that Scotland Yard had no knowledge of the Yellow Man. How he obtained admittance to the Palace on the night of the theft I know not to this day.

I gathered from Inspector Dove's manner that he guessed I knew more about the vanishing of The Enchanted Stone than was necessary for the editing of a penny popular weekly; but I preserved an enigmatic urbanity of manner, and when at last he departed, quite unsatisfied, I went to Madame de Gruchy's rooms.

The offices of *The Bee* are so well known that I need only describe them cursorily. The friendly six-storied red-

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 77

brick building, in the Queen Anne style, on the Middlesex side of the river, is, in its way, as striking a landmark as Somerset House or Cleopatra's Needle. High above the roof, supported by slender iron pilasters, floats a gigantic aluminium bee, with silver-gilt outstretched wings. At night multi-coloured electric lights pick out the sprawling body, with clusters in either eye alternating red, green, and flame-colour. The ground floor of the building is not unlike the public hall of a prosperous bank. Eighty-five clerks are needed to keep account of the Little Mother's millions.

Her private offices are in the west wing. Accountants are located in one suite of rooms, solicitors in another, brokers in a third, and surveyors in a fourth. Beyond is the telegraph operators' department. A huge ante-room, with closets for a butler and two page boys, who have new liveries every four months, connects the east and west wings. It is flanked by two doors,



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one leading into the editorial rooms of *The Bee*, the other to Madame de Gruchy's private offices.

Into this ante-room I stepped on my way to the Little Mother's apartment, primarily to inform her of Mayfair's absence, as it was his duty to make memoranda of the proceedings during the various audiences.

She was seated at the window desk, in a high-backed chair three steps from the ground, with a raised table in front, commanding a wide view of the river. There I have known her sit motionless for an hour at a time, her elbows resting on the arms of her chair, her chin sunk upon her breast, her sad green eyes gazing at the flying clouds and rolling water.

Across the river a glimmering curve of yellow spots of light peeped shyly through the fog. A tug, dragging two small boats, in which sea-faring men stood balancing themselves, raced down the middle of the river; a skiff bobbed on the billows; a

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 79

string of barges slouched through the muddy waves; then suddenly a voice below shouted, 'The Great Robbery. Further details.' At those words the Little Mother withdrew her gaze from the window and smiled upon me.

'Your interview with Mr. Kettle was well timed,' she said in her low rich voice. 'Have you any further particulars?'

I mentioned Inspector Dove's visit.

'Ah! will you be so good as to let me see the Oriental manuscript you received yesterday morning?'

'The devil!' thought I, 'who has been spying?'

'The author has communicated with me,' she explained, as I prepared to ring the bell for a messenger.

When the manuscript arrived she studied it closely, and then said abruptly, 'Where is Mr. Mayfair?'

I explained that he was unwell, and suggested that I should act as his substitute.

The Little Mother motioned me to a chair, and seated herself at a desk in the middle of the room. At her side was a long, deep drawer half open. It was full of sovereigns. This was the Little Mother's petty cash box. She never used a purse. It was her custom to carry gold loose in her pocket, where sovereigns rattled against knife, pencils, and spectacle case.

Many sought interviews during the next hour. At no time was the Little Mother communicative, but to-day her detachment was so marked that some of her visitors ill concealed their annoyance. She sat with her eyes fixed upon the floor. Important statements were made to her. Important questions were addressed, generally to her understanding, particularly to the back of her head, but she remained as unresponsive as a waxen bust in a hair-dresser's window. 'Do you authorise the expenditure?' asked one. 'We are advised that the paragraph was libellous,'

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 81

said another. 'The machine-man says the paper is rotten,' complained a third. To these remarks, as to many others, the Little Mother, so far as I could perceive, gave no intelligible answer. When the last had departed she heaved a deep sigh and raised her head till her green eyes confronted mine.

'A singularly interesting document,' she said, indicating the Yellow Man's manuscript, which lay upon the table. 'I feel deep sympathy for the writer. I would help him if I could.'

With that she relapsed again into contemplation, and I left her to her dreams. She did not seem to notice my departure. You may be sure I closed the door softly.

Mayfair greeted me with delight when I reached home that evening. He tossed my hat upon the couch; he sent my stick rattling into a corner; and, dragging me to a chair, he commanded an account of my adventures. The boy seemed to feel

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no ill effects from the wound. His recuperative power was wonderful.

I told him everything, from the finding of the Enchanted Stone in Grosvenor Place to its disappearance in the clutch of a yellow hand through my office window.

‘I, too, have been in Romance Land,’ was his comment; whereupon I flashed the bank-notes before him.

His eyes gleamed; he whirled round the room in a sort of triumphal dance; then he made a bee-line for the place where I stood. ‘What is the Enchanted Stone?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know what it is,’ I replied gravely, ‘but I can tell you what it does;’ and with that I described its antics in the beam of sunlight.

He laughed hilariously; indeed, he laughed me into a bad humour.

‘It should be dinner-time,’ said I, rising and moving towards the door.

He clutched my arm penitentially. ‘I hate myself for laughing,’ he said, ‘but

## Mayfair makes an Acquaintance 83

you should have warned me it was a nightmare.'

As we walked up the street I quoted the words the Little Mother had used in speaking of the Yellow Man's manuscript — 'I feel deep sympathy for the writer. I would help him if I could.'

Mayfair stopped. Gravity paused on his face.

'Now, that *is* serious,' he said.

Before the week was out it became clear that Mayfair's intuition was right. The Little Mother and the Yellow Man were in constant communication. They were often closeted together, and on more than one occasion the Yellow Man glided stealthily past Mayfair and me on the stairs.

'Look here,' the boy cried one day when we had darted into my room to avoid meeting him, 'we've been awfully slack over this Oriental business, but let's take it seriously in hand without further

## 84      The Enchanted Stone

delay, and upon a system. The Enchanted Stone we'll shelve for the present. Let us advance by easy stages, beginning with the triple flame symbol. Now when, and where, and how often have you seen it?'

'At the trial.'

'Yes.'

'Tattooed on the arms of the Orientals at Lambeth.'

'Yes.'

'In the hospital.'

'Yes.'

'On the Enchanted Stone.'

'Y-e-s.'

'On my paper-weight.'

'Go on, go on.'

'On the door of the log hut.'

'Wh-e-re?'

'The log hut upon the raft at Lambeth. And also on the purple cloth the girl was embroidering.'

'Wh-a-t?'

I recalled the adventure.

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 85

Mayfair sprang to his feet. 'Why did n't you tell me about this — about the purple cloth and the log hut?'

'Surely I mentioned it in my letter when you were in Switzerland.'

'Never a word about the purple cloth and the log hut,' he exclaimed. 'Do you mean to tell me that you have n't followed up that clue?'

'No, adventures are to the adventurous. I am not adventurous.'

'Ass!'

'Mayfair!'

'Oh, in the Pickwickian sense! But, my dear fellow, sometimes you make me very tired. But to business. We'll idle no more. Can you recall the appearance of the symbol?'

'Yes. A triple flame. It's stamped upon the Yellow Man's manuscript, you know. Ah! that's another instance.'

'Where is that manuscript?' he asked eagerly.

'It should be here,' I replied, rummag-



ing in a drawer labelled *For Consideration*.  
'Yes.'

I handed the scented pages to Mayfair. He thrust the side containing the symbol into his pocket, crying gaily, 'Adventures are to the adventurous. Expect me at Buckingham Street to-night.'

The afternoon passed quickly. I dined in the neighbourhood, and by a quarter past eight was seated in my rooms. Five minutes later a furious knock sounded upon the outer door. When I opened it Mayfair seized my arm. 'Come with me at once,' he cried. 'I'll talk as we go along.'

First he had gone to the British Museum, where he quickly ran to earth an Assistant Keeper of Mediæval Antiquities. To him Mayfair had shown the symbol at the foot of the Yellow Man's manuscript. The expert, after a patient examination, made reply, 'This is a rough drawing of a design upon an ancient Indian tablet in this Institution. I presume it has been copied from that tablet.'

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 87

The ingenuous youth answered that the drawing had been copied by a friend, who had asked him to discover its meaning, whereupon the Assistant Keeper conducted him to an exhibit in the long gallery. It was an oblong piece of stone, upon which a picture was roughly hewn. To the right was seated a gigantic image of the Sun-God. Before him, in attitudes of adoration, stood a king and two priests, and between them, resting upon a stool, and supported by cords held in the hands of attendant spirits, hung an object about the size of a child's fist, upon which was graven the triple flame Sun-symbol.

Then the Assistant Keeper delivered himself thus: 'This is one of a great number of tablets erected by — by — I regret I am not able at this moment to remember the name — an ardent votary of the worship of the Sun-God. The inscription above the heads of the figure signifies, "When I westward go, follow

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me.” The tablet has been photographed and engraved. Possibly it was from the engraving your friend made this copy. Illiterate Orientals, I believe, harbour a superstition about this symbol.’

‘I thanked the old gentleman,’ Mayfair continued, ‘and skedaddled to the raft at Lambeth. My aunt! what an ineligible situation. One of the windows of the log hut was boarded, but the other was clear. I peeped in ——’ Here Mayfair paused.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘proceed. I’m curious to know why I ’m being taken to Westminster.’

‘If I pause sometimes,’ he explained, ‘it’s because the swelling possibilities of the affair are apt to take my breath away. You remember the girl with the olive complexion and the thin flaxen hair who came from the Sacred Valley?’

‘I remember the girl, of course. She did n’t tell me where she came from.’

‘Well, two things have happened since

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 89

the day you escorted her to the National Gallery. First—she has become a mother.’

‘Ah!’

‘Second—she has become sympathetic.’

‘Which means she has been telling you secrets.’

Mayfair smiled. ‘Let me proceed with my story. Just recall a Madonna and Child by some swell old master, and you will understand what I saw when I peeped into the window of the log hut. The girl was seated on a kind of throne at the far end of the room, gowned in a magnificent mantle which enveloped her and fell in glowing folds upon the floor. A child lay in her lap. It was trying to shove its fist through one of lots of sun-symbols that were blazoned over the mantle in threads of gold. The mother’s eyes were fixed upon the child with a look that kept me quiet. It was a sort of *pot pourri* of love, and admiration, and devotion, and reverence, and wonder, and joy, and hallelujahs, and hosannas in the

## 90      The Enchanted Stone

highest. I'm not much given to sentiment, as you know, and I ain't over reverent, but, upon my word, the sight gripped me. I waited a bit, and then I had a happy idea. It was clear the girl attached some tremendous significance to the sun-symbol. "That being so," I argued, "the Yellow Man's drawing of the blessed thing should be a passport to her confidence."

'I knocked at the door, and, without waiting for an answer, turned the handle and entered. As I approached she threw the mantle over her child and cowered back against the wall. I smiled paternally, genuflected upon a little square of carpet, and held aloft the paper containing the sun-symbol. Her manner immediately changed. She withdrew the mantle from the child, and, would you believe it, offered me her right hand to kiss. This I did in the manner of statesmen in the *Graphic* Coronation number. Soon we were upon excellent terms. Taking it for granted

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 91

that I was one of the initiated — her English, by the way, is excellent — she spoke as frankly of a “destiny” in store for the child as if I knew all about it. When I mentioned The Enchanted Stone she clapped her fingers to her lips and looked like a scared thing. But she was quite willing to talk of her former companions and of the tall Englishman who was kind to her. Their business at the wharf on the Westminster side of the river, whatever it was, is now finished, and the seven in scarlet petticoats, all except the girl’s husband, who, I regret to say, is now with the Lord of all the Worlds, are living at leisure in Lambeth — waiting.’

‘Waiting for what?’ I asked.

‘For the Miracle,’ Mayfair whispered.

‘The Miracle!’ I cried. ‘What miracle?’

‘*You* think they’ve come to an end. Second century, was n’t it? Well, the little Sacred Valley matron holds a different opinion.’

‘Please leave me out of the question. What is the Sacred Valley miracle?’

‘The Great Revelation is n’t indigenous to the Sacred Valley. It embraces half the world. For centuries dusky and turbaned multitudes have lived and died hugging the promise of the Great Revelation as the most precious possession of their poor lives. Certain sections of Hindoos, Parsees, Persians, Tibetans, Cashmeri, Arabs, and I don’t know how many more Eastern nations, have been secretly and indissolubly united by the common belief that the day of the Great Revelation in the west *will* dawn. Then will be seen the glory and the splendour of—well, I don’t quite know of what. The little matron could n’t or would n’t tell. Sounds like a missing word competition, does n’t it?’

‘It explains a good deal,’ I said.

‘The solitary place will be glad,’ he went on, ‘and the desert will blossom as the rose, and there will be no more tears.

## Mayfair Makes an Acquaintance 93

The mere idea makes one want to be a minor poet. It's a kind of Eastern freemasonry. They wait, these nations, for a sign in the West.'

Mayfair paused and looked me in the eyes. 'I can guess your thought,' he said; 'it's a remarkable analogy anyway.'

'I'm taking you to headquarters,' he whispered as we skirted the Houses of Parliament and entered the narrow riverside street. 'I wormed the secret from the Sacred Valley matron — guileless little soul. It was at one of these wharves the Orientals landed. Ostensibly they ran a marble business. They shipped the blocks from Bremen Quarries. The marble business is a blind. If the little matron spoke the truth you'll presently see something that'll astonish you.'

By this time we had reached the entrance to an alley leading down to the water, of sufficient width to allow a cart to pass. It was quite deserted. Into



this alley we plunged, picking our way between slabs and small monoliths of marble till we reached a terrace overlooking the river. To the right loomed a large wooden structure. The south end abutted upon the Thames mud, the north side stretched back to the roadway. Through the roof a faint light flickered.

Mayfair pointed to the structure. 'We must climb,' he muttered. 'Stay where you are for a moment.'

In a couple of minutes he returned, carrying a small ladder. The triple flame symbol was burnt into one of the rungs.

Mayfair placed the ladder into position and ascended. I followed, to find him lying at full length upon the roof, peering through a skylight into the building.

Crouching down by his side, I also peered through the skylight.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT THE EAVESDROPPERS HEARD

**W**E looked through an open skylight into a dry dock where lay a queer craft. In form it was not unlike a Thames barge, but there the resemblance ceased. It was such a barge as you might expect to find in fairyland or pursue in dreams.

Within and without it shone with a dazzling whiteness, glowing from stem to stern like sea-foam in the hard light of a spring sun. Mast, deck, tiller, ropes, stanchions had been removed, leaving only the bare shell, and small platforms fore and aft nearly level with the bulwarks. From the middle of the aft platform a white dome, like the cupola of a mosque, rose, and upon it, in waving lines of inlaid gold, shone the sun-symbol. Around the dome a profusion of red flowers was scattered.

## 96      The Enchanted Stone

Amidships stood a cradle, and before the cradle stood a pilaster supporting seven golden filaments, and in the clutch of the filaments was a wizened hand, the horizontal forefinger and thumb uppermost, and bending inwards. Upon the aft platform a brazier flared, and in the air swung a candelabrum bearing seven lights, and higher still, amid the black rafters, just below our noses, an octagonal lamp, burning aromatic oils, was suspended. Pacing noiselessly to and fro along the side of the dock, turning each corner with the swift, sly movement of a caged animal, I started as I recognised the long, lean body of the Yellow Man, and again when Mayfair, nudging my elbow, pointed to a figure almost hidden by the white dome. It was the Little Mother listening avidly to the Yellow Man's impetuous speech.

‘The Occident,’ he was saying, ‘fears that the Lord of all the Worlds no longer speaks to men. Fools ! Fools !! Fools !!!

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 97

Here in the West, on a tongue of land which curling points, and pointing curls into the ocean from which the sun is daily born, and into which it daily dies, shall the Great, the Final Revelation be made. The Lord of all the Worlds will ——'

The rest escaped me, but I saw amazement sweep the Little Mother's face.

'When? When?' she cried.

'At sunrise of the summer solstice, when the years of the Holy Child are three.'

'And may I be there to see,' muttered Mayfair, and then he proceeded to whistle the first line of the hymn — 'O that will be joyful.'

I clapped my hand over his mouth. 'For goodness' sake control yourself. See, the Little Mother speaks again.'

She was under the stress of great emotion. Twice she essayed to utter her thoughts, but each time the words came dumbly to her lips.

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The Yellow Man, however, understood, for he dropped into the boat and pushed back the shining panels that formed the perpendicular wall of the fore platform. From the dark cavity he drew a squat package, the size of a Gladstone bag, wrapped in a napkin, and held together by a broad tape and buckle. Having first reverently placed the parcel upon his head and uttered the sentence, 'May I be obtaining the blessing of Thy holy word,' he laid the package upon the floor and unfolded the napkin. It contained a bundle of yellow parchment sheets covered with hieroglyphics and gorgeously illuminated.

He searched the sheets, then said with great solemnity, 'Herein is written the prophecy of the Great Revelation to be made in the West, whither the Suns hasten and disappear in glory.'

The recital lasted an hour. When it began, Mayfair and I seized our notebooks, and although we worked under

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 99

awful disabilities, for it sleeted and was bitter cold, we took a full note.

Here is the gist of our transcription :—

In the first century of the Christian Era, King Nara, who reigned in Northern India, was troubled by the idea of annihilation after death, and the conquering worm haunted his dreams.

One day certain long-haired men, emaciated by travel and privation, with mouths full of terrible tales of persecution and massacre, came to the city of Pepperthala and craved an audience of the jaundiced monarch.

Their tidings produced a remarkable effect upon King Nara. His melancholy dropped from him like a garment. 'I, and perhaps you, shall not wholly die,' was the message he ordered his body-servants to cry at every street corner, and the people believed him. Was he not their king?

But as time went on it became clear that the monarch was still troubled in

mind. He bit his lips, he plucked viciously at his henna-dyed beard, and his manner was so irritable that three of the courtiers hinted that they would be obliged to leave his service. Little did they guess that the cause of the royal discontent was actually a longing for a more personal, a more direct intimation of the favour of his Creator.

It was the Wise Master of the Court who showed the way of happiness to his royal master, for he discovered that the Christians had brought with them certain writings telling how the Lord of all the Worlds had in ancient days descended from the high heavens to talk with the elect, and that such as found favour in His sight had heard His voice.

‘Bring me these writings,’ cried King Nara. And when they were brought unto him he said, ‘Read.’

Then the Wise Master of the Court, with much stumbling and hesitation, for he had but newly acquired the language, trans-

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 101

lated certain passages cunningly chosen by himself beforehand.<sup>1</sup>

‘When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo! an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.’

King Nara, having pondered awhile upon these words, cried, ‘Read on, O Halting Tongue.’

And the Wise Master of the Court blushed and continued: ‘The angel of the Lord appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And God called unto him out of the midst of

<sup>1</sup> In transcribing I have used the English of the authorised version.



the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people, and I am come down to deliver them from the Egyptians. And they shall hearken unto my voice, and thou shalt go three days into the wilderness.'

When the Wise Master of the Court had read thus far, King Nara cried, 'Cease! Lo! I, too, will go three days into the wilderness. Peradventure the Lord of all the Worlds will appear also unto me as a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.'

He laid aside his cloak of purple and his crown of soft gold, and clothing himself in a garment of coarse twined linen, and taking a plain staff in his hand, King Nara went three days into the wilderness.

On the third day, at sundown, he threw himself upon the ground to sleep beneath an overhanging rock. But before he slept he fell upon his knees, and, raising his

arms, prayed that the Lord of all the Worlds would remember his servant King Nara and show to him a sign, even as he had done to the men of old time.

About the last hour of darkness King Nara awoke and hid his face in the sand in fear. For a voice called his name. King Nara raised his head. Before him stood a man of old time.

‘Brother,’ said he of old time, ‘what would you?’

And King Nara answered, ‘I would see the Lord of all the Worlds, even as a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. I would have speech with him. Or even let a sign be shown to me.’

Then there was silence between them, while the man of old time drew with his finger upon the sand of the desert till the sun rose. And when he had finished he lifted his hand towards the risen sun. ‘Brother,’ he said to the King, ‘you ask for a sign. Behold, the Vicegerent of the Lord of all the Worlds.’

And King Nara fell upon his knees before the sun. He made no movement with his lips, but in his heart he still craved for a miracle, and lo! the sun opened, and from its midst a ray of the Infinite Light in the form of a triple flame shot through the air and fell dazzling at his feet. Even as it fell clouds banked the sun, the heavens were darkened, and the ray of Infinite Light became like a stone, black as the coal in the mine, and damp as the earth after rain. Then King Nara drew a circle about that part of the desert sand where the man of old time had drawn and written with his finger, and he cried, 'Here shall stand the sanctuary of the temple which I will build unto the Infinite Light, Vicegerent of the Lord of all the Worlds; such a temple as eye has never seen or imagination conceived. The doors shall be of gold, and the domes of alabaster and gold. And upon the high altar I will place the stone of Infinite Light, which the Lord of all the Worlds has given to me.'

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 105

Returning to his kingdom, and calling together his cunningest artificers, he commanded that the signs which the man of old time had drawn with his finger upon the sand of the desert should be preserved for ever. So over the bark of the shrub that grows by the Chinese border-lands they smeared the yellow varnish of the Upal tree, and thereon they copied, in letters of silver and letters of gold, the signs that were written by the man of old time upon the sand. And it was called the Scroll of Promise.

In the desert where he had slept, King Nara built the Sun City of Pepperthala. The Enchanted Stone of Infinite Light was placed upon the high altar in the Temple, and the Scroll of Promise was hidden in an innermost recess of the sanctuary. And King Nara worshipped the Sun, Vicegerent of the Lord of all the Worlds, and his people did likewise.

The Yellow Man ceased. The Little Mother moved restlessly in her chair.

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‘I have heard of the ruins of the Sun City of Pepperthala,’ she said, trying to speak with composure, ‘but it is hard to associate the erection of a — er — Pagan building with a — er — er — divine intervention such as you describe.’

‘The Enchanted Stone remains as a witness to the miracle,’ said the Yellow Man.

‘Am I to infer,’ she cried, agape with astonishment, ‘that the gem stolen from the Rajah of Pepperthala at Buckingham Palace and the miraculous stone that fell at the feet of King Nara are identical?’

The Yellow Man inclined his head.

‘When the Mohammedan invasion swept over India, and the Afghan soldiers laid the Sun Temple in ruins, the Brothers of the Sun fled to the north, and after journeying many months, they crossed the icy barriers, and so came to the Sacred Valley,<sup>1</sup> where they hid the Scroll of

<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to locate the Sacred Valley, save that it is in Tibet, somewhere north-east of Lassa.

Promise, but the Enchanted Stone remained in the ruined Sun City of Pepperthala, hidden from the eyes of the conquerors. There was it left in the charge of the beaten ruler of Pepperthala and his descendants for all time, that the mandate might be fulfilled—"Remove me not, but when I westward go, follow."

'And lo! the great day is now at hand,' he shouted, throwing his hands into the air and drawing himself to his full height. 'The Lord of all the Worlds has sent the Stone of Infinite Light into the West, and I—I—I shall in a little while behold the revelation of the Lord of all the Worlds.'

His voice rose in crescendo as he spoke, and with the final words he leapt into the vessel, and throwing himself face downwards before the black hand that shot upwards from the seven golden filaments, he abandoned himself to emotion.

This lightning outburst ended as sud-

denly as it had begun. He returned to the Little Mother's side, calm, intense, enigmatic, as before. She asked a brief question whose purport I did not catch, but it had reference to the Enchanted Stone, for the locality of that antic thing was revealed to us, and in a most surprising manner. The Yellow Man stalked to the far corner of the dock, and crouching down, fumbled with one of the panels. There was a creaking of machinery, then the wooden wall of the building rolled slowly back, disclosing a spacious, dimly-lit chamber and the figures of seven scarlet-clad Orientals sitting cross-legged in a circle around a tray. The tray was covered by a napkin, and upon the napkin lay a black object. The guards did not raise their heads when the wall rolled back. Their eyes remained fixed upon the Enchanted Stone, but I noticed that their fingers closed viciously upon their long knives. Then, at a touch from the Yellow Man, the panels rolled to again,

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 109

and the Enchanted Stone, with its guard of silent watchers, vanished from our gaze.

‘The Stone of Infinite Light will never more pass from our keeping,’ said the Yellow Man. ‘In the East the vigil was of peace, but when the Stone of Infinite Light passed to the West, where all the suns disappear in glory, the vigil became a vigil of war. The Brothers of the Sun would die a thousand deaths sooner than permit the unregenerate even to gaze upon its glory.’

‘Hum!’ said Mayfair.

The Little Mother asked another question.

‘What are the Brothers of the Sun?’ she said.

‘What are the birds that fly the air? What are the lotus plants that grow upon the water? Can you number the birds of the air or the lotus plants that float in the pools? Neither can you count the Brothers of the Sun. They exceed in



number the subjects of your Queen who have made roads to the uppermost parts of the earth. In every nation of the East you will find the Brothers of the Sun, and upon the flesh of their arms they bear the sun-symbol. Arabs from Mesopotamia and the valley of the Tigris, Bedouins of the desert, wild Somali, the bearded cowards of Cashmere, the wondrous nations of India, the learned Chinese, the little warlike men of Japan, water-drinkers of Persia, warriors of Abyssinia, dwellers by great rivers, shepherds of Egypt, brethren of my own in Tibet, star-gazers, hunters in high hills, yea, even men of the icelands from whom the blessed sun is hidden, watch and wait for that sign in the West which the Lord of all the Worlds has promised to mankind. And lo! the day is at hand. The centuries of waiting are over. The Enchanted Stone has passed into the West. *Mangalam! Mangalam! Mangalam!*'

The Little Mother's face was rose-red.

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 111

Her eyes shone, and when she spoke her voice trembled. 'The drawing upon the sand, the Scroll of Promise. May — I — I — see it?'

Again the Yellow Man swung himself into the vessel, again at his touch the panels of the fore platform rolled aside. This time he withdrew an ancient scroll wrapped around a stick. Holding one end high above his head, he let the roll unfold, and as it uncoiled, the letters of silver and the lines of gold that danced over it glittered in the light of the flaming brazier.

The scroll, about six feet in length, was divided into two sections, and in each section sprawled a picture, and above each picture were lines of close writing.

Through the first a wide river flowed, over which the sun was just rising. On the water floated a boat, and in the boat stood a cradle, and in the cradle lay a child staring wide-eyed at a spot of light that flashed at her feet.

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In the second picture a long, narrow peninsula, curling at the extremity, shot into a calm sea. Perched on a high ridge at the end was an enormous temple. It was sunrise, and a ray of light, piercing the temple door, shot arrow-like through the aisle.

The Little Mother started to her feet crying aloud, like one possessed, 'The spot, the very spot.' The Yellow Man gazed at her with astonishment. 'Nothing, nothing,' she explained. 'The drawing recalls my native place — that is all.'

She stared a long time at the design, then exclaimed in a tone wherein both wonder and joy were expressed, 'St. Wees Bay needs but the Temple to make the resemblance complete.'

'What a piece of luck for the Yellow Man,' Mayfair whispered. 'Look, he's actually smiling.'

Indeed a swift expression of triumph did flit over his face, but he checked it,

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 113

and inclined his head towards the Little Mother, who was still gazing at the glittering designs.

‘Their meaning?’ she whispered.

The Yellow Man placed his hand reverently upon the first picture. ‘At sunrise of the summer solstice, when the time is ripe shall the Holy Child come to us who are weary of waiting, come to us at dawn over the waters of a great river. So it is written.’

‘Two years from that day,’ he continued, pointing to the other picture, ‘shall the second prophecy be fulfilled. At sunrise of the summer solstice, at the end of the third year of the Holy Child’s life, the Lord of all the Worlds will, through the mouth of the Holy Child enthroned in the sanctuary of the Sun Temple, make the Great Revelation promised to King Nara by the man of old time. So it is written.’

The Yellow Man ceased and bent his head in prayer. I glanced at Mayfair,

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who smiled enigmatically. 'I shall be there,' he whispered. 'A water picnic upon the Thames at sunrise will be a new experience. But I wish he'd adjourn the present meeting. It's uncommonly interesting, but how my limbs ache!'

Fortunately the end was near. The Little Mother, profoundly impressed by her companion's story, seemed quite prepared to accept the Nara miracle, prophecies, and interpretation without demur. The Enchanted Stone had certainly passed to the West, but it had come amongst us in quite a natural way. State cabin of a P. & O. boat, special train and a drive in a royal carriage to Buckingham Palace — what journey could be more prosaic?

The Little Mother's voice broke into my reverie. 'Are you prepared for the fulfilment of the first prophecy?'

'Henceforth, each year, at the summer solstice,' cried the Yellow Man, 'the doors of this dock will be thrown open,

## What the Eavesdroppers Heard 115

and this vessel, with the Stone of Infinite Light lying between King Nara's thumb and forefinger will be launched upon the waters. If to us who are waiting the Holy Child appears, then the building of the Sun Temple will begin. In two years it will be finished, and the day of the Great Revelation will dawn.'

'It will be very costly to build such a temple,' said the Little Mother. 'Have you the money?'

'It will be provided. My hands I will raise to the heavens where the Vicegerent of the Lord of all the Worlds reigns, and lo! they shall be filled.'

An inspiration seized me, suggested by the attitude in which he stood with his arms outstretched above him. Here was a chance to rid myself of the bank-notes. I withdrew them from my pocket-book and dropped them one by one through the opening.

They fluttered gracefully through the air, and fell upon the aft platform. The

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Yellow Man leapt forward. His face expressed the liveliest astonishment.

‘You fool!’ cried Mayfair.

I dragged him away.

We scrambled down the ladder, ran at full speed up the yard, and did not slacken till we came abreast of the House of Lords.

## CHAPTER VII

### I AM INSTRUCTED TO BUY THE FINGER

**T**HAT night, when at last I fell asleep, it was to the obsession of a horrid nightmare. The Enchanted Stone perched itself on the iron rail at the foot of my bed, glowing and glaring, till my own cold fears awoke me.

In the morning I went early to the office, and forced my mind to its duties. Providentially I was relieved from the ordeal of an interview with the Little Mother, as a note awaited me to the effect that business had called her to St. Wees. She expected to be absent a week.

Mayfair and I lunched together. He was in a flamboyant mood and disposed to make merry over the Yellow Man's confidences.

'There are two considerations,' I interposed, 'which compel us to treat the



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matter seriously: the Little Mother's millions, and the power—the occult power—possessed by the Enchanted Stone.'

'The question of her millions can be dismissed at once,' he returned airily; 'if she chooses to spend a fortune in building a Sun Temple, well—that's her affair. It's only one more folly—*tout vient de Dieu*. As for the Stone, what on earth do you mean by calling it enchanted? Because it's affected by the sun? That's nothing! Old gentlemen in skull caps at the Royal Society's soirée, with nothing to help them but a blue light and a smell, produce much more wonderful things. You might as well call me enchanted, or the British Museum, or Lamb's Conduit Street.'

'You know perfectly well there is something uncanny about the Stone,' I said.

He coloured. Which surprised me.

'Moreover,' I continued, 'there's the evidence of my own eyes.'

‘Evidence! Kickshaws and strong tea (I know your ways) working upon an undisciplined imagination. Come and play golf. That’ll restore your mental balance. But I’ll never forgive you for returning those notes. You — words fail me. F-i-v-e t-h-o-u-s-a-n-d p-o-u-n-d-s. Ah, well, come along.’

Nevertheless it was plain to me that Mayfair was not easy in his mind about the Stone.

As we walked down the street he remarked casually, ‘When you said the matter was serious, you hit the nail on the head. There’s a third consideration.’

‘Well?’

‘Never been to St. Wees, have you?’

‘Never.’

‘D’ you know,’ he cried, clutching my arm, ‘that the figuration of the coast-line of St. Wees Bay and the second picture on the Scroll of Promise are as like one another as two peas? Take away the Temple and the picture on the Scroll of

Promise is a panorama of the bay. It might have served as a model.'

'Impossible,' I said.

'Improbable, anyhow. But it means just this—that the Little Mother will build her Temple. That the prophecy may be fulfilled, etc. Lord, what fools these mortals be! It's an amazing coincidence, anyhow. Does the third consideration impress you?'

I was premature in congratulating myself on escaping an interview with the Little Mother, as a few days later I received a telegram commanding my immediate presence at St. Wees. I could ill be spared from London just then, as we were in the midst of preparations for our winter number. Two days' absence was the limit I might permit myself, and I telegraphed her to that effect.

I arrived at St. Wees an hour before sundown, alighting at the little station tucked away under the hill. While look-

ing for a porter to carry my bag to Perseverance House, the white stone mansion the Little Mother had built a few years before on the brow of the cliff, I was accosted by a podgy little man of colour. A faded red turban was wound about his sleek head, and the gold braid with which it was trimmed had never been renewed. Otherwise his dress was by way of being British — a skimpy frock-coat, tight shepherd's plaid trousers, and a pair of elastic-side boots. He greeted me with a bland smile. When he proffered his hand, I noticed the sun-symbol was tattooed above his wrist.

‘The honoured Mother,’ he murmured, ‘begs that you will partake of the tea-meal, and later trusts that you will adjoin her upon the Island, whither it will felicitate me to conduct you.’

He tripped by my side making amiable little speeches, while his goggle eyes gleamed benignantly from behind his steel spectacles. He would not cross the thresh-

old of Perseverance House, but, while I was having tea, paced to and fro upon the terrace, twirling his cane and smiling affably at the landscape. When I rejoined him he bowed like a dancing-master, and, with a wave of his plump little hand, invited me to accompany him to the Island.

The Island is a grass upland rising from the sandy isthmus which joins it to the outskirts of St. Wees. To the right the coast sweeps round in a noble curve to Junction-town. There begins the narrow peninsula called The Finger, three miles long, most desolate and wind-blown, pointing bluntly into the sea. A mile out from Junction-town, along The Finger peninsula, stands Dynamite village, then, in those days, desolation to the extremity, save for the Red River, so called from the discoloration of its waters away up in the tin country, which flows down the peninsula, discharging into St. Wees Bay, where the end of The Finger curls round into the ocean.

Now! — Ah!!

As these places are all so closely associated with the modern history of the Enchanted Stone, I have marked their positions on a rough map.

To the Island I was led by crooked alleys and roughly paved courts, past rocky slopes black with fishing-nets spread out to dry, over the little sandy isthmus, then up the grass side of the hill to the summit, where I discerned the solitary figure of the Little Mother. She was gazing over the waters of the bay, motionless as Reflection on a monument. It was a wonderful sight that met my eyes. The Finger was illuminated by the after-glow. The sand shone, and the little foaming waves that curled against the shore were blue as the waters of an Italian lake. Every window in Dynamite village gleamed as if afire, while over all hung a great brick-dust cumulus, that changed even as I looked to a cloud of flame.

The Little Mother motioned me to sit

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by her side, and again swept the waters with her eyes.

Already the light was fading. Soon — soon that coast, which might have stood for the lodge gate of fairyland, lost all its rainbow hues and became dun as a theatre landscape by daylight. Then the stars began to peep out in the clear sky ; all was still, save the hollow call of the waves and the cries of the restless gulls.

The Little Mother gave me a searching look ; then she asked abruptly, ‘ Have you ever studied Orientation ? ’

I confessed to the omission.

‘ Oh,’ she cried, ‘ the Temples of the world — the Temples old as Time, staring at the east and flushed by the rising sun ! They cry to me. Were they all for nothing ? These magnificent buildings erected at such labour and cost, the splendid hierarchy of priests, the devotion of millions of worshippers — were they all for nothing ? Blind, deaf, stubborn are we

of the West. Blind eyes, deaf ears, stubborn hearts. May the Lord give to the people of this land fuller understanding, and to me faith and endurance!’

I murmured sympathetically, but surely I had not been summoned to the land’s end to be told this.

No, she had a purpose.

‘Will you, to-morrow,’ the Little Mother said after a brief pause, ‘be so good as to make an expedition to The Finger, and oblige me with a report on — er — its appearance? I wish you also to arrange for its purchase. I shall probably build there next year.’

‘What about price?’ I asked.

Annoyance shadowed her solemn face. ‘I wish to buy The Finger,’ she replied.

Then she rose and led the way down the hillside in silence. Just before we reached the mainland I stumbled over a rubble stone and fell forward, pitching a book from my pocket into a pool of rain water.



‘Emerson!’ she interjaculated, as I dried the covers — ‘the Camelot selection. May I?’ She opened the volume beneath a lamp and dropped a resolute forefinger upon a chance passage.

As she bent towards the close print, elation seized her and joy flashed into those green eyes.

‘Read!’ she commanded, and her trembling hands thrust the book before my eyes. It was open at page 206. Her finger had dropped upon the first four lines of the second paragraph on these words: ‘I look for the hour when that Supreme Beauty which ravished the souls of those Eastern men, and chiefly of those Hebrews, and through their lips spoke oracles to all time, shall speak in the West also.’

‘In the West also! In the West also,’ she murmured; then her head fell forward and her lips moved in prayer.

Her small strong figure stood out in silhouette, her eyes travelling round the

bay till they rested upon the point of The Finger curling inwards through the luminous water. Turning towards me, she cried in a quick intense whisper, 'The Island, the curve of the bay, The Finger, what does it remind you of, what is it like?'

My obvious reply, that it resembled the thumb and finger of a hand, roused in her an extraordinary agitation. She selected a stone from the ground with some care, and placing it between her thumb and finger, stared at the arrangement with hushed delight. I was silent. Chance and fate were indeed working for the Yellow Man.

Then she started forward again, and did not speak till we reached Perseverance House. I saw no more of her that night. When the gong sounded, a servant brought me her excuses; so the gentleman of colour and I dined alone.

That night I dreamed I saw the Little Mother kneeling before King Nara's

shrivelled thumb and finger, paying her fetish the compliment of imitation.

Next morning I bade good-bye to the Little Mother, sent my bag straight through to London, and set my face towards Junction-town. I had executed many strange commissions for my employer, but this — to buy a peninsula — was, I think, the oddest.

Leaving Junction-town, where the train dropped me, I clambered up the hill and struck at once into the desolation of The Finger, but missing the waggon-track that leads to Dynamite village, I was soon floundering among sand-dunes, springy uplands, and bosky glades, through which rabbits and the Red River raced side by side.

In that delightful solitude I wandered for two hours, and although a steep hill gently persuaded me from climbing to the nail of The Finger, I had seen quite enough to be able to write an account of the lie of the land. This I did that same

afternoon in the smoking-room of the Estuary Inn at Junction-town.

I was never alone. Tradespeople, fisher-folk, men from the engineering works, loafers, the captain and mate of a dynamite steamer, drank and smoked and lolled in the arm-chair seats, and as they discussed everything and everybody within a radius of ten miles, I soon learnt the name of the owner of The Finger.

He was an absentee landlord, with a London and a local agent. I found no difficulty in obtaining the address of the London office, and as the rain and wind showed no sign of abating, I returned to London by the night train.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PROPHECY OF THE FIRST YEAR

**M**Y interview with the owner of The Finger was amusing, but as it is not vital to the story, I refrain from setting it down. When a multi-millionairess desires a thing for which the owner has no particular use, the conclusion is foregone.

By the end of the month the Little Mother was the owner of The Finger.

‘If she *must* build a Sun Temple,’ said Mayfair when I told him of the enterprise, ‘it’s well the experiment should have plenty of elbow-room.’

My life settled to its old routine. I saw much of Mayfair, but nothing of the Yellow Man, and the theft of the Enchanted Stone was apparently forgotten by press and public. Yet as the days passed, the affair was impressed upon me by the insistent evidence of the presence

in London of an extraordinary number of Orientals. For a time I strove to believe there was nothing abnormal in this, but by the time of the Little Mother's return to London I could no longer blind myself to its importance. This sudden appearance of a nation of Orientals in London would have aroused more interest but for the fact that they were to be encountered, in great numbers, only in the river-side streets from Blackwall to Hammersmith. Districts distant from the river had apparently no attraction for them. The suburbs knew them not, but they swarmed in Thames-side small hotels and lodging-houses. I discovered by personal inquiry that after the 1st of June there was not a vacant bed in those districts. If the Strand streets that lead down to the river were crowded, the populous country by the eastern Thames was congested. The distress among these aliens was pitiable, as many of them had left home with hardly anything above their passage money and

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the tawdry finery in which they were clothed.

In the second week of June the press discovered the invasion. It became the fashion for smart parties to journey down to the docks to watch the Orientals arrive. Had it not been for the coins tossed on the decks of the steamers as the vessels advanced at tortoise-pace from dock to dock, I believe many of the Orientals would have landed absolutely penniless.

The Cockney welcomed them with jests and characteristic personal remarks. What did it matter? What harm could accrue to him or his trade from these undersized, inarticulate strangers? So the copper-coloured, pock-marked rabble continued to pour into London without hindrance, and the city gathered them to her mighty arms. I watched the spectacle with foreboding, but Mayfair did not share my anxiety. 'Never fear, they'll have scurried back by the end of June,' he said consolingly.

The Little Mother was a changed woman. She spent hours behind locked doors, and although I never actually saw him, the aromatic odour that constantly pervaded the building proclaimed the Yellow Man's visits. Poor lady, little did she guess that Mayfair and I knew her secret.

One morning she sent me a peremptory message to see her immediately. When I entered the room she was pacing restlessly up and down with flushed face and animated gestures. Seizing my arm, she cried, 'A very important and unique ceremony will be performed on the 21st of June — sunrise — Thames, at Westminster. Concentrate the entire reportorial staff upon the event. We must publish a special supplement — you understand. It should go to press by noon. Be silent and discreet. The reporters must not be given their instructions till the eve of the 21st, and — and [she shook with emotion] the supplement is not to be



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issued *without written instructions from me*. You will receive the order one hour after sunrise on the 21st. Those instructions will either be "Publish" or "Do not publish." "

. . . . .  
The weather that summer was unusual. More hours of sunshine were registered during the month than any June of the previous fifty years. From morn until evening the sun blazed upon the city. Men discarded silk hats and black coats altogether. Many wore flannels. Half the theatres closed their doors. The asphalt in Cheapside seethed and bubbled under the burning rays. In Regent Street blocks of the wooden pavement forced themselves above the roadway. Omnibus horses dropped dead on their journeys. The East End gasped, groaned, and grew fetid under the misery of a water famine. The mortality from English cholera reached terrible proportions. And still the sun blazed down upon the parched

city; still the Orientals poured into London.

It may have been imagination, but it certainly seemed to me that the 20th of June dawned even hotter. I sat in my office for the greater part of the day—with windows wide open, blinds drawn—unable to work, haunted by an inexplicable sense of approaching calamity. Nature seemed to have hushed herself to silence. Hardly a sound reached me from the thoroughfare outside. Nobody called during the afternoon. Nothing happened except that the driver of one of *The Bee's* distributing carts was smitten with a sunstroke, and a compositor fell from his stool in a fit of heat-apoplexy, breaking an arm and dislocating his ankle.

An article in the current *Spectator* on 'The Power of the Black,' which I had cut out and pinned upon the wall, buzzed in my head—this passage especially: 'There is weighty evidence as to a coming change in the struggle between the white

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and the black races. The present writer, who has passed his life in watching that struggle, has always maintained that while the effort of the whites to secure a predominance over brown, yellow, and black men is justifiable if, when it is secured, the whites make of their predominance a lever for the steady upheaval of the subjugated tribes, the difficulty of the task is absurdly underrated. The white men have struggled to subjugate their darker "brethren" for four thousand years, and up to the middle of the last century had effected absolutely nothing beyond a small lodgment on the nearly uninhabited extremity of Southern Africa.'

At seven o'clock Mayfair and I made a pretence of dining; afterwards we haunted the Thames and patrolled the parks. The spectacle was amazing. The localities we visited were monopolised by yellow, copper, and black men in multi-coloured turbans, and women in rainbow robes. They crawled about the Embankment like flies.

Some leant over the parapet gazing at the rushing waters, others sat huddled upon the iron seats, an army of them glided up Northumberland Avenue and debouched into St. James' Park. It was clear that many purposed spending the night in the open, for they carried rugs and shawls. Numbers had slept in Battersea Park for weeks past. They were exceedingly gentle and law-abiding, rarely speaking to one another, but going to and fro in a strange city, enduring the taunts and witticisms of the vulgar, with a restraint born of the deep spiritual conviction that homed in their serious eyes.

London had at last made up its slug-gard mind that something was amiss. The people thronged the streets as on an illumination night. Strange to say, West and East did not mingle. *We* kept to the footways; *they* glided along in endless procession between the traffic and the curb. On this night there was no interchange of remarks, no quarrelling, no badinage.

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The day of taunts and personalities was over.

The Orient had triumphed. It had chained the attention of the Occident, which was afraid because it could not give form to its fear.

I returned to the office at a quarter to ten. The Embankment was still crowded with Orientals. Westminster Bridge was impassable, and a Member of Parliament, whose cab was delayed by the crowd, asked a question on the subject. I gave the reporters their instructions, and afterwards walked back to my rooms, intending to sit up all night. Mayfair, who had promised to share my vigil, had unaccountably disappeared.

It is seldom quite dark on those wonderful midsummer nights. Throwing open the window, I gazed out over the tops of the still trees to where the river rolled and rippled beneath a luminous sky. New thoughts and strange illusions chased hot-foot through my mind. I seemed to lose

corporeal consciousness. I became one with the river that flowed beyond the still trees. The sense of its power, eternal through the ages, fretless, pauseless, possessed me. It was no longer a geographical feature, but a living spiritual entity, with its mission to fulfil. I threw the run of my own trivial life into its mighty course. Here the channel was controlled by banks, and worried by piers and bridges, even as my own life was guided by the subtleties of heredity and moulded by the restrictions of temperament. Yet a little onward and the river would broaden out, stone banks and arched bridges would drop away, and the waters, gathering volume as they rolled, would be received into the Ocean, the less in the greater, the part in the whole. Peace—joy filled me. The ultimate destiny of my own life became clear. I stretched out my arms ecstatically to the sky. I called aloud to the river. The tramp of measured feet broke into my reverie. The Brothers of

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the Sun were marching westward. Big Ben struck three. In less than an hour the sun would rise.

. . . . .

At half-past three I stood upon Westminster Bridge. It was quite light. The moon rode high in the heavens. A delicate flush spread upward from the eastern horizon. A great multitude — grave, silent, expectant — surrounded me, and stretched in dense mass north, south, east, and west. They swayed down the Bridge to the Victoria Embankment; they struggled for standing-room upon distant Thames-side wharves. Lean, yellow faces peeped above the bulwarks of the craft that dotted the river. Heads craned from the windows of houses. Turbaned men, enigmatic women decked in Eastern finery, stood ankle deep in the mud that the low tide had left; others perambulated Lambeth and Waterloo bridges; but the throng was densest on the causeway that runs parallel to the river in front of St. Thomas's

Hospital, which commands a view of the black shed arching the dry dock where the Sun Boat lay.

The doors of the shed were closed. The wharf looked deserted, but just above the terrace of the House of Commons rocked a steam tug, painted white, her crew stiff as statues. The Yellow Man sat in the stern, the Little Mother by his side. Behind them a hawser was coiled.

Suddenly the Yellow Man threw up his hands, and a murmur, low, but of great volume, rose from his neighbourhood and rolled over me and away. Then the doors of the shed opened, and the Sun Boat, that I had not seen since the memorable night of the Yellow Man's revelation to the Little Mother, shot out upon the river. The tug backed towards it, the Yellow Man attached the hawser, foam churned around the paddle wheels, and slowly the procession came towards us. As it neared Westminster Bridge, every head was bared



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and hands were crossed upon breasts. Many women knelt. I glued my eyes upon the Sun Boat. She was unchanged. There was the white dome, with the sun-symbol blazoned upon it, the gold cradle, the pilaster, the seven filaments, and King Nara's skinny hand. But the hand was no longer empty.

In the space between the thumb and finger rested the Enchanted Stone, black as the wrinkled hand of the dead king.

As the Enchanted Stone came into view, the Orientals stretched their arms towards it, uttering little cries like the sounds made by the dumb when they try to speak. A stone's throw below Westminster Bridge, at a signal from the Yellow Man, the tug eased.

It wanted but three minutes to sunrise. There was no wind. So profound was the silence, that I could hear the ticking of my watch, and mechanically I counted the seconds.

Two minutes to sunrise. Every eye was fixed upon the eastern heavens, where, behind tall buildings, domes, and many spires, the herald flush of sunrise was deepening. Suddenly a clock in a hurry chimed the quarter before four. A dozen others followed. Then Big Ben struck sullenly into the cacophany, and while the last note was still reverberating the rosy tinge rushed into flame.

Therewith a shout went up from the multitude—a mighty discord of dialects, the like of which I have never heard. For several minutes it continued to increase in volume till the sun—a dull red ball of fire—swung clear between the buildings. Then the clamour died away, and every eye was fixed upon the Enchanted Stone, that lay inert, and black as ink, balanced between King Nara's thumb and forefinger.

It did not move. It did not change colour. Yet the sun was already hot upon the cheek, and the dull red glow

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had given place to a scintillating yellow, so dazzling that I was obliged to shade my eyes.

Suddenly I was aware of a change in the demeanour of the crowd. Their joy was gone. Despair was settling upon them: this was conveyed to me subtly, in a way I do not know how to express.

As the rays grew hotter, the anxiety of the multitude increased. They gazed with painful intensity at that black spot in the black hand. The golden cradle flashed in the sun, the white dome shone like the Jungfrau on a midsummer noon, but the Enchanted Stone remained black as a crow in a snow meadow. Was I then mistaken, after all? Had my senses tricked me? Else why should the Stone remain dull and inert under those scorching rays?

Suddenly from the banks and boats Lambeth way came a sound less in volume, but stranger, touched with a more piercing joy, than the noises that had greeted the

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rising of the sun. I looked up quickly and saw — well, I can but describe what I saw. This is what I saw.

Down the middle of the river, on the shimmering ripples, a tiny boat came bobbing towards us. Placed lengthwise between the thwarts was a cradle, draped in a purple mantle shot with gold, and in the cradle lay a child, and at the child's feet was a small thing that glowed and moved sluggishly like some gaudy, torpid, tropical insect.

It was but a glance, and then I was lifted from my feet by the crowd, who rushed pell-mell towards the river. They cried, they wept, they shouted, they screamed, filling the air with their extravagant sounds.

Straightway the Thames was black with boats. Many who could not find seats threw themselves into the water till the river became dotted with bobbing turbaned heads. Wrenching myself free from my neighbours, I forced my way to the para-

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pet in time to see the Sun Boat shoot from beneath the bridge, in time to see the Yellow Man shouting and waving towards the little craft where the Enchanted Stone gleamed blood red at the feet of the Child. They were the first to arrive, and while the boats were still a hurdle height apart, the Yellow Man leapt across and prostrated himself before the Enchanted Stone. He raised the Child from the cot, and, bending over, laid her reverently in the golden cradle of the Sun Boat, which was now alongside. Four of the crew then lifted the purple mantle and held it marquee-wise amidships the Sun Boat, and when they lowered it, the Enchanted Stone was gleaming in King Nara's black hand.

The Yellow Man stretched forth his hands towards the sun. Instantly a forest of bare arms shot out in adoration, and with one voice the multitude hailed the Vicegerent of the Lord of all the Worlds. The swimmers were lifted into boats.

The procession was re-formed, the Sun Boat was towed back to the wharf, and disappeared with the Child and the Enchanted Stone in awful silence behind the water doors of the shed.

I stood still, too astonished for movement or speech. Was I dreaming? Had the prophecy of the first year actually been fulfilled? What was the meaning of the sudden appearance of this Child, and how did it happen that the Enchanted Stone lay pulsing and gleaming at her feet, when everybody supposed it to be there in the Sun Boat guarded by the Yellow Man and his swart crew? Were there two Enchanted Stones? Else how account for the other black gem which had been cherished and guarded by the Yellow Man ever since that memorable afternoon when he had drawn it through the displaced pane of my office window?

Whence came the boat containing the Child? Then three things synchronised in my mind — Mayfair, the girl from the

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Sacred Valley, and the raft by Lambeth pier.

To the raft I ran, not by St. Thomas's causeway, for that was quite impassable, but along the wide street behind the hospital, which was comparatively free from traffic. Breathless, I reached the spot, and, wet to the waist from a slip into the water (I jumped from the landing-stage to the raft), reached the log hut. The door was open. Within stood the girl from the Sacred Valley. Her hair was unfastened, her jaw had fallen, and there was terror in her eyes. Then she turned her head and grinned horribly at the sun.

I clutched her arm.

'Where is your child?' I shouted.

She grinned at the sun.

'Come inside,' I cried. 'You 'll be blinded if you stare like that.'

Still she grinned at the sun. I waved my hands between the sun and her eyes. They remained fixed. The lids did not

even quiver. I lifted her in my arms and carried her within. Mayfair was sitting there.

He looked up at me like one dazed.

‘This is a bad business,’ I cried.

‘Leave her to me,’ he said, taking the girl’s hand in his.

I moved towards the door. ‘Come to the office as soon as you can. You must answer for your share in the morning’s work.’

He nodded.

As I left the log hut the girl was chuckling and grinning at the sun, which beamed through the open door.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE CRAZY ARCHITECT

**I** RAN — I ran back to the office. As I crossed the threshold the Little Mother's deep voice reverberated through the building. 'Close all the doors,' she cried; 'let nobody enter or depart until the paper is published.'

At the top of the staircase she welcomed me. A carmine spot burned in either of her cheeks, and she grasped my hand effusively as she drew me into her room. At that moment I believe she was inclined to tell me the whole story; but other counsels prevailed, and she contented herself with the instructions that the report should take the form of a series of impressions by eyewitnesses, and that the writers should attempt no explanation of the gathering.

‘I will be responsible for an introductory paragraph,’ she added, ‘and oblige me by attending here immediately after publication.’

Thence I hurried to the reporters’ room, where five men were writing swiftly, with wrists well lifted from the table, cups of tea and odds and ends of food before them. Having arranged the handling of the account with the news editor, I proceeded to write down my own impressions of the midsummer morn festival, omitting the log-hut episode. I had written steadily for an hour, and was about to send up the last page of copy to the printers, when the door of my room opened, and somebody glided in.

‘Knock another time,’ I cried, without raising my head or lifting my pen from the paper. As I wrote, a faint, familiar perfume reached my senses.

‘Why do you come here?’ I said angrily.

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The Yellow Man made a rapid menacing movement towards me, but controlled himself. 'Peace, Peace,' he said. 'The Lord of all the Worlds has spoken. Blessed be His name. I am from your friend. He bade me deliver this letter to you.'

'Dear old man,' it ran, 'forgive me. She's lost her reason. It's all my doing. I'm taking her Home. Some of her people accompany us.

Yours now and ever,

MAYFAIR.'

P. S. — 'Her husband died, you know. I was lonely, and she loved me.'

I read the letter credulously, but, alas! the signature was genuine.

Amazed, I raised my eyes from the paper. The room was empty. I ran downstairs. The doors were still locked. 'Did you see anybody leave my room?' I inquired of the hall porter. No, he had

seen nobody. 'Yet the Yellow Man had been with me, and now was gone. 'Whither? How?'

'Oh, damn the Enchanted Stone,' I cried, 'and everything connected with it.'

Then a fat, white-aproned printer bustled into the room with the first galley proofs of the Supplement, and I was forced to concentrate my thoughts to the task of editing.

A little later, in the lull that followed between the passing of the final pages and the welcome murmur of the machines, I set myself to consider the situation. Neither Mayfair's affair with the Sacred Valley girl nor his wild journey surprised me. He lived to astonish his friends. Apart from the difference to my own happiness that his absence meant, it was maddening to know that he, and he alone, could explain the sudden appearance of the child in the boat, and the presence there of the real Enchanted Stone. That Mayfair was responsible, in some way or

other, for the extraordinary *dénouement* of the midsummer morn festival I was convinced, but how the real gem came into his possession, how he concealed the theft from the Yellow Man, I knew not. Conjectures were profitless. I could only go straight on, and steer my way carefully through the shoals of difficulties that loomed ahead. I had little inclination to battle with them alone. Upon one point, however, I was determined—that if the Little Mother really meant to build this preposterous Sun Temple, she must do so without my help. The paper claimed all my energy and attention.

My meditations had reached this point when a premonitory whirr of the machines, developing into a roar and rattle that shook the building, reached me from below, and a movement among the distribution carts and street-sellers who loitered outside proclaimed that the publication of *The Bee* had begun.

The affair was treated at great length in a second edition of a morning journal and by the evening papers, but the account in *The Bee* was certainly the fullest. Although many writers hazarded explanations as to the reason of the gathering, not one approached even approximately to the truth.

The general view appeared to be that it was a Mohammedan festival, and the advent of the child in the boat part of a carefully arranged programme. Nobody dreamed of connecting the dazzling object that lay at the foot of the cradle with the gem that had been stolen from the Rajah of Pepperthala at Buckingham Palace. What had they in common? One was black and lifeless, the other glowing and vital. 'Molten liquid steaming in a cup shaped like a hand' was one journalist's description of the stone lying between King Nara's thumb and finger.

These things I read later in the day, for publication had begun, and the Little

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Mother awaited me. I knocked at her door, but receiving no answer, entered.

She was seated at the high window desk, her back to the room, her face uplifted to the sky. I knew the words of the poem she was declaiming in that deep, impressive voice. They rolled towards me entreatingly as the prayer for aid against all perils at evensong. The Little Mother remembered others, even the dead, in the midst of her own great joy.

‘ Forget not, Earth, thy disappointed Dead !  
Forget not, Earth, thy disinherited !  
Forget not the forgotten ! Keep a strain  
Of divine sorrow in sweet undertone  
For all the dead who lived and died in vain !  
Imperial Future, when in countless train  
The generations lead thee to thy throne,  
Forget not the Forgotten and Unknown !

She turned, starting as she caught sight of me.

‘ Is the purchase of The Finger complete ? ’

I replied in the affirmative.

‘Then learn,’ she said, ‘that to this generation is to be given a great and glorious mark of God’s favour, and He has permitted me to act as a humble instrument in the furtherance of His plans. Read.’

Whereupon she laid reverently in my hands a thin quarto with the sun-symbol stamped upon the covers. Printed in black-letter type, it contained a history of the Brothers of the Sun, of King Nara, of the miracle, and the prophecies connected with the Enchanted Stone—in fact, the story that the Yellow Man had confided to her that memorable night in the Sun Boat.

When I had finished reading, it was made clear that my opinion was not wanted.

She took the book from my hands, remarking casually as she did so, ‘It remains to choose an architect. Who? ah, who?’

‘You really mean to build this Temple,’ I said.



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‘I build it,’ she replied.

‘But the cost will be enormous — enormous.’

‘I build,’ she repeated.

Then I capitulated.

‘What kind of a Sun Temple do you propose building?’ I asked.

‘I wish it to be the noblest and the most beautiful edifice the world has known,’ she answered. ‘The large dome must be white as snow, the hundred smaller domes the colour of gold, and the Propylon will be approached by an avenue of colossal figures of the great and good [her eyes flamed] who died in the knowledge of the deep mystical experiences that come of regenerate life. The architect must conform rigidly to certain essentials, but apart from that full licence will be given him. Who? ah, who?’

I thought of Mr. Norman Shaw, but could not bring myself to mention his name. Then an idea occurred to me by which I might avoid responsibility.

‘Why not examine the drawings in the architectural room of the Royal Academy?’ I suggested. ‘Who knows but one of the exhibitors may suit your purpose.’

The Little Mother approved the notion, and soon we were driving towards Burlington House. I did not anticipate any satisfactory result from our pilgrimage, as the drawings of buildings at Burlington House are somewhat academic, and the Sun Temple — well, it could hardly spring from an academic brain. As we entered the architectural room I was surprised to find at least three people gathered there. A little dried-up man with a large eyeglass was expatiating upon a model in carved and painted wood, standing upon a platform in the middle of the room.

‘I tell you,’ he was saying, ‘it’s the best thing of the kind that’s been done this century. It’s no good, of course — sheer waste of time pecuniarily, but it’s something nowadays to find a man who

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does things for the love of 'em — you take me — for the love of 'em, without ulterior motive.'

We drew near. It was a remarkable exhibit, described in the catalogues thus: 'The Palace of Rameses III.: model to a scale of eight feet to an inch, showing the true appearance of the building in the time of the great king, from drawings made on the spot and much study of the literature of the period.'

The model presented to my untrained eyes a bewildering array of Colossi, huge halls, stupendous columns, obelisks, pillars with great bell-shaped capitals, and a courtyard as large as Olympia. It was signed Antonio Babb.

'No, I don't know who he is,' the little man with the eyeglass squeaked; 'never heard his name before. But he's got imagination and a fine feeling for proportion. I've seen the Temple of Rameses III. It's on the plain of Thebes — mere ruins. To create this from a jumble

of broken columns — why, it's genius, sheer genius.'

He moved on, the Little Mother and I standing mute before the Temple of Rameses III. A similar thought was in our minds, and presently, from the corner of my eye, I observed her fumbling with the catalogue.

'Antonio Babb, 315 Hampstead Road.' She looked meaningly at me.

'Shall I call upon him?' I asked, for the fat was in the fire, and hydrants were not wanted for this blaze.

'And be so good as to bring him to the office at once.'

I took a cab to the Hampstead Road. No. 315 stands in a terrace bordered by a long desolate garden where flowers once grew. A tiny servant-maid, soiled but sprightly, with a long end of cotton wool hanging from her left ear, opened the door.

'Mr. Babb in,' she echoed. 'Well, that's a good 'un. He never goes out till after dark, poor gentleman.'

‘Indeed,’ I said.

‘Yes, and then only with the pram. There it is.’

‘I thought children were generally taken out by daylight,’ I remarked.

‘Mr. Babb ain’t got no young children.’ she said scornfully.

‘Then why the perambulator?’ I ventured to remark.

The little maid wiped away a tear. ‘Well, if you don’t know, I ain’t goin’ to talk. Poor gentleman! There’s quite enough knows his story already without me chattering about it. Second floor, door on the left.’

I left the little maid and made my way upstairs.

As I approached the second floor, the lilt of a jig played upon an unfamiliar instrument reached my ears. It was accompanied by the tones, not unmusical, of a man’s voice, marked here and there by a hiatus when the voice dipped into monosyllabic expletives. I knocked twice with

no effect. Then I slowly opened the door and stepped inside.

The blinds were down and the curtains drawn, although the day was radiant. The room was lighted by six candles flaring in tall gilt candlesticks. In a corner stood a disorderly bed, upon which, propped up by pillows, his chest and arms bare, Mr. Antonio Babb reclined. At first glance his entire face, head, and neck seemed to be covered with tangled black hair, through which the black eyes gleamed furtively. His shoulders were excessively broad, and the backs of his hands, twice as wide as mine, were covered with coarse black hair. On a chair by the bedside was a lump of green modelling clay, and perched upon the coverlet were a number of little figures the size of the Tanagra relics, representing devils, imps, fauns, and gods — abnormal, wanton, and grotesque.

The man himself was making music from three strings stretched across an empty cigar box, and endeavoring at the

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same time by a spasmodic motion of his legs to make the green clay figures dance.

‘Hasten, children,’ he chuckled. ‘Hasten! The night cometh when you may no longer dance. I hope my music does n’t annoy you, Noble Stranger,’ he said, turning suddenly on me, and making so low an obeisance that his forehead touched the coverlet.

‘Not in the least,’ I replied. ‘I’ve called to see you upon a matter of business.’

‘Business!’ he cried, ‘business — ah! that’s good. It’s a lifetime since Babb heard the blessed word. Pray excuse Antonio for a moment.’ With that he leaped from the bed, and waving me towards the only chair in the room, proceeded to clothe himself.

His toilet was primitive and perfunctory. It consisted of a coloured flannel shirt, an old tweed suit, a red neckerchief, and a pair of elastic-side boots stained by

the mud of myriad streets. He ignored my presence while he was dressing, soliloquising and chuckling through the operation. 'Business! That's good! Who'd 'a' thought of business coming to old Babb? Babb's the boy for business. Do anything! Go anywhere! But nothing irregular, nothing shoddy. You have had the honour, Illustrious Stranger,' he added, thrusting a cloth cap upon his head, 'of seeing the toilet of an Artist. And now, Most Noble Mæcenas, with your leave we'll descend my poor stairs.'

'I should explain that I am only the agent for Madame de Gruchy in this affair,' I remarked over my shoulder, as we left the room. 'My instructions were simply to ask you to be so good as to meet her this afternoon. There my responsibility ceases.'

'Sir Patron, your explanation is entirely satisfactory,' he cried, bumping his crutch upon the landing and making me another bow.



The descent of that steep staircase was an unpleasant experience. I groped my way through the gloom, guided by the ramshackle balustrade that trembled as I leaned against it, hearing behind me the crazy architect's laboured breathing, and the thud of his crutch upon the bare boards. I opened the door and called a cab.

'No!' he shouted, and when I turned there he was stumping down the passage, pushing the perambulator before him.

Before I had time to remonstrate the little servant-maid signalled to me from the area. 'Don't vex him,' she said in a loud whisper. 'Ever since his two poor babies and his wife was burnt in the fire he always wheels the pram with him whenever he goes out of doors. He won't ride in no 'ansom cab! Not he! And he gets that angry if you say anything about the pram to 'im.'

I accepted the little maid's advice. Our journey was enlivened by the jeers that

Mr. Babb and his perambulator evoked; and those who did not taunt stopped to smile at the sight of this tall, broad-shouldered, shock-headed cripple who used his crutch as if it were a weapon for the protection of an empty perambulator. In spite of his infirmity he advanced at great speed. It needed all my activity to keep pace with him, and by the time we reached the office I was breathless.

Mr. Babb consented to leave the perambulator in charge of the hall porter, and then stumbled after me up the stairs. The clock struck five as I knocked at the door of the Little Mother's room. She and the Yellow Man were the only occupants. I presented Mr. Antonio Babb to the Little Mother, who immediately drew him aside.

The Yellow Man, his hands folded across his breast, was examining an architectural plan on a stretch of paper, discoloured by age, and as long as a draper's counter, pinned against the wall. It bore

a title in archaic characters, and beneath this in the Little Mother's handwriting were the words, 'The Sun Temple, built by King Nara in the city of Pepperthala.'

The Little Mother's interview with Mr. Babb was apparently satisfactory, as her face was radiant when she turned from him.

'What man has done, man can do again,' she said. 'The builders of old possessed unlimited labour. We have money without limit. Will Mr. Babb now examine the plan?'

I shall never forget the strange spectacle of that crazy architect, hobbling backwards and forwards before King Nara's Sun Temple, grunting and gurgling, making notes with a stumpy pencil upon a piece of cardboard, and growing more and more excited every minute.

At the end of a long quarter of an hour he came towards us biting a finger-nail.

'The site?' he gasped.

'Waste land in Cornwall,' the Little Mother answered.

'Time?'

'Two years less one day,' she replied.

'Say twenty,' he chortled.

'Two,' she replied, 'less one day.'

'Impossible, dear lady.'

'I place no limit on the cost.'

'Do you ascend to millions?' he cried, lifting his crutch foot by foot till the point scratched white upon the ceiling.

'To millions!' she answered gravely.

'Three, four, five, six?' he shouted in crescendo, emphasising the numerals upon his fingers.

'Say ten to begin with. Excuse me.' She seated herself at the desk, wrote rapidly for a few moments, placed a letter in an envelope, stamped and sealed it.

'Instructions to my broker,' she explained, tapping the envelope. 'Within a week a sum of ten million pounds will be lodged in the Bank of England to the credit of the building of the Sun Temple.'

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Your fee will be ten thousand pounds on the day it is finished.'

The Yellow Man fell upon his knees and kissed her hand. I rubbed my eyes, pinched myself and sighed to discover that I was really awake. Antonio Babb struck his crutch against the floor. 'Munificent Madam,' he cried. 'I am your most obedient and honoured servant. The Sun Temple is already built.'

## CHAPTER X

### MAYFAIR'S CONFESSION

THE Little Mother, the Yellow Man, and Antonio Babb departed into Cornwall. The control of *The Bee* was left entirely to me. The Little Mother ceased to show any interest in its progress. Her life, her fortune, her hope of salvation for herself and the world, were centred in the building of the Sun Temple.

My life resumed its usual run. The little hut on the raft by Lambeth Pier was desolate, and the wharf by the terrace of the House of Commons, where Mayfair and I had first gazed upon the Sun Boat, was locked and barred. The Orientals had gone unobtrusively as they had come.

Mayfair! It was six months since he had left, and I had heard nothing from him. His silence admitted of two explanations: he was ashamed, or he was be-

yond civilisation. I favoured the latter view, for, whatever his folly that Midsummer morning, his was not the temperament to take an escapade to heart.

Before long the direction of his wanderings was dramatically revealed to me. At that time this country was fighting out the Soudan problem. An advance section of our Expeditionary Force had pushed south, and for a fortnight nothing had been heard of them. The days passed without news. Anxiety gave place to foreboding. The names of the missing were published. The worst was feared. Then came my opportunity. One morning I received the following telegraphic message *via* Suakin. It was sent, not to the offices of *The Bee*, but to my lodgings in Buckingham Street. '*Meeting to-day. Firm in Bankruptcy. Thousands of creditors. Our loss small. Prepare.*' I could make nothing of this cryptic announcement, and decided that it must be a business telegram sent to me in error. Half

an hour later my housekeeper brought me on another communication from the same source. It ran: 'Correction of previous telegram. "Mayfair for prepare."' I thrilled. He was alive, then. But what did the message mean? Why should he telegraph to me as if he were a chartered accountant? I carried the telegram to Huxley de Gruchy, the most intelligent of the orphans, who had been on terms of greater intimacy with Mayfair than the others. He examined it with intelligence.

'Don't you remember,' he said, 'the code you invented when the Tzar was dying at ——?'

I rushed back to my room, snatched a little book marked 'Key to cipher telegrams' from an inner compartment of my desk, and within three minutes the solution of Mayfair's telegram was before me. This was the interpretation:

'*Meeting to-day — Victory to-day.*'

'*Firm in bankruptcy — Enemy in flight.*'



‘*Thousands of creditors* — Thousands of killed.’

‘*Our loss small* — Our loss small.’

Soon a special edition of *The Bee* was selling on the streets, containing the news of the victory, and the rout of the Dervishes. For myself I suffered the torments of the journalist who has staked everything on the word of an imaginative correspondent at the end of nowhere.

Then the torment ceased. A long telegram was received by the Foreign Office confirming the victory, twelve hours after *The Bee's* announcement. Of Mayfair himself the report gave no word. I telegraphed, I made enquiries, but learnt nothing. Still knowing the fertility of his imagination, and his ingenuity of resource, I did not lose hope.

There is no need to give in detail the history of the ensuing months. The Little Mother wrote me but one letter from St. Wees — a friendly little note in

shaky calligraphy, pathetic and most complimentary, in which she announced her intentions with reference to *The Bee* in the event of her death.

One morning, it was just a year after the departure of the Little Mother into Cornwall, I was seated at the office reading with my back to the door, when darkness suddenly descended between the page and my eyes. I seized the impudent hands, and sprang to my feet.

Mayfair stood there. Thin, sallow, wasted, — but Mayfair.

‘Hulloa,’ said I.

‘Hulloa,’ cried he.

‘But why did n’t you wire? You — you *are* alive?’

‘And kicking,’ he shouted, wringing my hand.

Then we yarned — we yarned, till I turned him out of the room, for it was press day.

Later we talked the sun down the sky.

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The account of Mayfair's captivity among the Dervishes may be told another time. It was crowded with romantic episodes of which his escape (you may have read about it) was not the least remarkable. But egotism was not one of the boy's characteristics. He ran from his own adventures, and cried for the story of my days without him.

When I told him that the Little Mother and the Yellow Man had been in Cornwall for a year, building the Sun Temple, he threw off his coat and danced like a Dervish, or as I imagine a Dervish might dance.

'Tell me *all*,' he cried — 'all, all, all! What does the Temple look like? How far is it advanced? What is it costing?'

'I know nothing,' I replied. 'I have n't been to Cornwall since you left — in fact, I know no more about the Sun Temple than you do.'

His blue eyes opened wide. Then slowly he put on his coat.

'Laodicean! Sluggard!' he hissed.  
'10.15 from Paddington to-morrow morning. No excuses. We start.'

'On one condition,' I replied.

'Yes?'

'That you tell me *your* part in the events of that midsummer morning.'

'Yes, yes, it's right that you should know,' he said gravely. 'I always meant to tell you. Carry your mind back to the morning after the — er — theft of the Enchanted Stone from Buckingham Palace when I called at your rooms.'

I nodded.

'Do you remember the appearance of the Enchanted Stone?'

'Yes.'

'Anything odd about it?'

'Not in the least. It was almost a facsimile of the paper-weight my aunt gave me.'

'Which was also lying on your table that morning.'

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‘Yes, I often write in my bedroom. Which reminds me I haven’t seen the paper-weight lately, in fact, since — since —’

The words broke on my lips. I stared at Mayfair open-eyed.

‘Yes,’ he interjected, ‘it was the *paper-weight* which you carried down to the office: the *paper-weight* which the Yellow Man drew through the window: the *paper-weight* which the Orientals guarded day and night in the hold of the Sun boat: the *paper-weight*, which, on the midsummer morning festival, lay in the grasp of King Nara’s hand, and before which the assembled multitudes bowed their innocent heads. And all the time the Enchanted Stone was lying quietly in my pocket.’

‘Are you serious?’ I asked.

‘Grim.’

‘It’s incredible that the Yellow Man should have been deceived.’

‘Why? Consider! he saw the real stone only once in his life, the night he

stole it from the Rajah of Pepperthala, although he had heard it described a million times. The Brothers of the Sun know all about the Enchanted Stone from infancy. Copies of it are common as strawberries in July. They use 'em as charms.'

'Why should he have doubted the authenticity of the stone he drew through the pane of your office window? It tallied exactly with the description treasured in his mind. He dared not place it in the rays of the sun—that would have been sacrilege—so the fraud remained undiscovered till the midsummer morn festival when I went one better.'

'Yes! You went one better!'

The ready tears started to his eyes.

'For God's sake, don't reproach me,' he cried. 'It cuts like a knife. Don't interrupt! Let me get it off my mind! When I saw those fools bobbing before your aunt's paper-weight, peeping out of the corners of their eyes for the coming of

the child in the boat, I — I sort of pitied them. All at once the devil set my invention going. They should have something for their money — full measure and brimming over. I ran to the raft. I was mad with excitement. Did I realise what I was doing? God knows! She was asleep. Been watching all night. I seized the cradle (the child crowed at me), crammed it into a boat, and pushed the lot off from the raft. The Enchanted Stone was in my pocket. I tossed it into the cradle. I guess nobody saw me. The whole crazy lot had scurried down to Westminster when the Yellow Man began his antics. Then she awoke. She came to the door of the hut. Oh, my God! I saw madness catch her. I could n't make her understand. And then — after a lifetime — you appeared. . . . She died a day's journey from her home. Her people seized the body directly we reached the boundaries of the Sacred Valley. They made me turn back. I knocked

about the world for a long time, and finally joined our fellows in the Soudan. That's all.'

'So the "miracle" was achieved by a trick,' said I.

'There are historical precedents.'

'Your confession, at any rate, makes our journey to Cornwall a plain duty,' I added.

'To show me up?' Again the ready tears started to his eyes.

'Mayfair, don't you think the Little Mother should be told?' I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'She's lived on illusions all her life. But do as you will.'

Soon a smile broke over his wan face. 'I don't think you'll have the courage to tell her,' he said.

And in my heart I concurred.

We started the next morning. The journey was uneventful, until next evening brought us to Junction-town. How changed it was! Formerly I knew the



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town as a somnolent and very middle-aged place, drowning slowly in its own estuary without fuss and without regrets. Often for a whole day the harbour knew no other craft than the sturdy, dynamite steamer, with warning red flag, or the lifeboat which practised saving errand boys on summer afternoons.

But now how changed! A pall of black smoke hung overhead. Strings of barges, like great black snakes, were creeping across the bay. Steamers from the outer world were making for the quay, where mighty cranes clutched stone monoliths and cubes, and dropped them into the trains of trucks that ran all day, to and fro, along The Finger.

St. Wees, too, was transformed. In the harbour strange craft jostled the fishing smacks, and in the streets of the town, upon the yellow sands, upon the island uplands, men and women stood gazing in wonder at the monstrous structure that was growing on the nail of The Finger.

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It seemed as if the folk of St. Wees had ceased to be interested in their town, in their work, or in their play. The mackerel boats put out to sea, the Salvation Army fanfared against the walls of the Halls of Science, the Lowestoft men swept the ocean on the Sabbath, but nobody minded. Whenever a man or woman looked up from work, his eyes turned instinctively to that spatulate Finger on which 'the Devil was building his Kingdom.'

The waiter at the Pilchard Hotel, where Mayfair and I put up, was a sceptic and truculent.

'Let the old lady look out for Cap'en Dan Tremayne,' he muttered, when Mayfair broached the subject.

'And who is Captain Dan Tremayne?' he asked.

'Cap'en Dan Tremayne,' replied the waiter, 'was, till God smote him with obesity, overseer, or Captain, as we call 'em in this part of the country, of Tin-

barrow mine, Camborne way. He's the finest lay preacher in Cornwall, and it's 'im who Madame de Gruchy will have to watch, or one fine morning she'll find the Sun Temple blown sky-high.'

'Meaning, that the Methodist fishermen and miners object to the Sun Temple?' said Mayfair.

'I mean nothing, sir,' he answered. 'I'm Sussex bred myself, but my wife's a Cornish woman. Let Madame de Gruchy watch Cap'en Dan Tremayne. That's what my wife says.'

'Is Madame de Gruchy at home?' I asked.

'Never slept at home this six months,' he replied. 'She's built a bungalow out there by the Red River, and there she lives.'

The western window of the hotel overlooked St. Wees Harbour. Beyond the masts of the vessels, which stood up like lances, the Island loomed out of the twilight. A swelling crowd gathered around

a circle of flaring naphtha lamps, and across the isthmus of sand. Others were hurrying to join the congregation.

We looked at one another, and then at the waiter.

'To-night Dan Tremayne preaches against idolatry,' he said.

Mayfair put on his hat. 'T is n't often I feel in the mood for church,' he remarked.

It was a weird sight that opened upon us as we climbed the grassy slopes of the Island and joined the congregation. The men were quiet, but the women's mouths were full of gossip and forcible feeble threats. Every ear was strained to catch the words that fell from the thick lips of Captain Daniel Tremayne — a monstrous figure — who sat in a cripple's chair, within the circle of naphtha lamps.

The lights flickered upon his angry, oily face. The phrases rasped from his throat. His hands whirled in harmony with his words; his big head accentuated

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the phrases, but the dropsical body sat supine in the chair.

Captain Daniel Tremayne had never set foot outside Cornwall. Without sympathy, intolerant of sentiment, a masterful intellect had carried him to eminence. Entering Tinbarrow as a boy, he had risen to the highest position, and under his control the mine had become one of the few dividend-paying concerns in the country. Like many other Cornish miners, he had found the relaxation, or perhaps the purpose, of his life, in preaching. For years he had fulminated three or four times a week from the pulpits of Primitive Methodist chapels. When the extraordinary obesity which afflicted him had made an end of his work at the mine, his great energies were diverted to preaching and propagandism. The building of the Sun Temple offered a magnificent subject. Here were the idolators cheek by jowl with his flock! Heathenism was flaunting within the very

gates of Methodism! The reign of the Beast was imminent! The millennium would be postponed ten thousand years. The Devil was already preparing his arrows, — and to Daniel Tremayne had been given the task of fighting and destroying him. Not a Cornishman questioned his authority. They brooded solitarily over his exhortations. At night time, from the windows of lonely cottages, figures shook their fists angrily at the eagle light that flared from the golden dome of the Sun Temple.

Captain Dan Tremayne was entering upon the peroration of his discourse as we drew within earshot.

‘Fools! fools!’ he screamed, flinging his fat hands towards The Finger, ‘this night your souls shall be required of you. That was the message that was burnt upon my’eart in letters of fire when I sat last in the presence of God and looked upon the Devil’s work that’s being done over there. And as for you,’ he added, turning swiftly

upon the awe-struck men and women about him, 'where will be your mackerel fishin' and your pilchard fishin' and your net mendin', when the Holy Seraphim that stands between the two gates points you down the road that leads to 'ELL? For it's 'ELL you'll go to if, when I give the word, you don't raze the 'eathen Temple to the ground, and put to flight these sons of Beelzebub, that have settled like locusts in our midst. What will be your reward? Why, a crown glitterin' with diamonds and rubies that the Lord Jesus Christ will put upon your 'eds. 'Oo tuk care of poor old Lazarus? 'Oo tuk care of Moses? We know in 'oo *we* trust.' And at these words a deep 'Ay, ay!' went up from the dim distracted figures.

'E'll lead us beside the still waters,' piped an old man far down the hillside, and a hoarse 'Ay, ay!' again rose from a score of lips. Then, as if by instinct, the whole congregation turned towards The

Finger, and I thought for a moment they would march that instant upon the Sun Temple. But the movement only emphasised a valedictory vow. Men and women dropped upon their knees, a long prayer followed, and then the Captain drove his chair forward with his hands, and followed by his flock, shouting and singing, descended the hill, crossed the isthmus and disappeared in the tortuous streets of St. Wees. And, as they descended, the night crept up from the sea, and the opening verse of a Wesleyan hymn rolled to the quiet sky.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

**N**EXT morning Mayfair and I set out for The Finger, and, as there was no convenient train, we walked the two and a half odd miles to Junction-town.

Was it only a year ago I had taken this same walk? Then I had stepped lightly between the rushes, and over the little hills, the song of birds in my ears, and the faint shouts of children at play calling musically. Now it was as if the foundries of the earth were roaring out their eternal fires.

The clocks were striking ten as we descended into Junction-town. A pall of sulphurous smoke hung over it. The waste estuary land was a wilderness of railway sidings crowded with dumpy engines

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and low, sturdy trucks, each carrying a block of stone as high as my shoulder. I counted a score of running cranes, and twice that number of steam saws. Picking our way through the muddle we presently struck a wide, newly-made road that pushed its way from where we stood straight over The Finger. Down one side of this road a multitude of men, who had been at work during the night, were slouching back to St. Wees. They walked four abreast, singing hymns. On the other side another army of men, but clean and fresh, were marching out to the Sun Temple. I fell into conversation with one of them, and from him I gathered that Madame de Gruchy had built, between Junction-town and Dynamite village, iron houses capable of accommodating twenty thousand men with their wives and families, that they were all paid double wages, and that the majority were foreigners.

‘How on earth do they feed them?’ asked Mayfair.

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‘Just wait till we get to the first milestone out, mister,’ was his reply, ‘then you ’ll see.’

When we reached the milestone I found that a wide, irregular stretch of common land, that I had noticed on my former visit, had vanished. Upon it had grown a town of shops. In sprawling gilt letters above a huge building in the centre I spelled out the words, ‘The People’s Stores.’

From this spot onwards the road was almost impassable. On either side the workmen streamed backwards and forwards, while along the centre a constant succession of vehicles passed. These carried the lighter burdens, the heavier objects travelling by rail through a deep cutting in the towans.

Beyond ‘The People’s Stores,’ the road breaks sharply off to the left, feeling its way upwards to the hill on which Dynamite village stands. The main roads from Oxborne and Heavenstone meeting at this

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spot swelled our turgid stream of men and vehicles to the point of congestion. Three times was I lifted off my feet, and on the third occasion after regaining the ground, I stumbled. The crowd swept on, and I lost sight of Mayfair. It was physically impossible to look for him. There was nothing but to go forward with the rest, so on I marched with this army of workers, walking like one in a nightmare, ankle-deep in the dust which rose in wreaths high above my head, sometimes quite hiding the metallic blue sky.

The country opened after we had reached the high ground, and I had just begun to rejoice in whiffs of fresh sea air, when the fumes of nitro-glycerine from the dynamite factory suddenly encompassed us. We broke into a run and did not slacken till we reached a defile bounded on either side by walls of sand. This sunken road continued for a hundred yards, and then climbed sharply to the left. As we toiled round the corner and swung into

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the open again, the sight that met my eyes was so unique, so magnificent, that I halted. My companions, to whom the spectacle was no new thing, divided and swept past, leaving me stranded, stationary, like an cyot on the Thames.

Straight ahead, perhaps a couple of miles distant, on the ridge of the first joint which rises high above the other parts of The Finger, the shell of the Sun Temple lay glittering in the morning sun. Its mighty length, from Propylon to Sanctuary wall, stretched broadside before me. Down the centre ran parallel rows of mighty columns, and on either side of this axis stretched courts, pillared halls, lakes, terraces, vast flights of steps, and circular buildings crowned by golden cupolas. Above these dazzling cupolas the great white Sanctuary dome towered towards the heavens. Beneath, the ant army of artificers worked unceasingly. I saw their hammers flash in the sun. I saw the Temple growing before my eyes. A flight

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of steps sprang into being as I watched ; a stunted column had grown three yards before I started forward again.

The air was resonant with discordant sounds and the chatter of tourists. Dynamite village, which a year ago was a pretty hamlet, with a tangled churchyard, was now a city, with flower girls, a Music Hall, and a dozen gin palaces.

From Dynamite village I descended to a vast, sandy plain called the Red River encampment, through which that river ran, bridged three times before it rushed into the ocean to dye the larger waters blood-red. At its mouth a wharf had been built, where the lighter freights unloaded, and a boat could be chartered to ferry you across the bay to St. Wees.

The Sun Temple itself was not visible from the Red River encampment ; to stare straight ahead was to see the silver gates, and to the right and left the beginnings of the bright railings of incredible length that encircled the base of the Sun Temple

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hill. But my eyes did not rest long either on the silver gates or the vanishing arms of bright railings. It was the stupendous figures of the great dead that chained the vision. These Colossi faced each other across a winding avenue fifty yards wide that ascended from the silver gates up over the brow of the hill to the flaming Propylon of the Temple. Between each Colossus was also a space of fifty yards, — each space a meadow of white flowers. That is what I saw from the Red River encampment — silver gates, the bright railings vanishing on either side round the base of the hill, the white flowers, and that sinuous line of enormous rough-hewn figures, staring sightlessly into space, winding up to the crest of the hill to the flaming Propylon.

Only the priests of the Sun Temple and a favoured few of the public were permitted to enter the silver gates and climb that mighty avenue. The workmen, the traction engines with their loads

of trollies, bore round to the right, and approached the Temple by an easier gradient.

The Red River encampment might have been called the Red River city. There were huge wooden hotels, acres of tents, chapels, odd little temples, theatres, wide streets lighted by electricity, two newspapers, and a railway. The first person who addressed me when I descended to the plain was an itinerant photographer.

It was late in the afternoon before I stood before the Little Mother's bungalow. An Oriental with lustrous eyes and a complexion like new bronze lay stretched at full length across the doorway, his chin resting upon his crossed hands, staring intently at nothing.

His mistress would see me in quarter of an hour. No, I would not enter. I preferred to spend the interval walking. Turning away, I met Mayfair. His face was flushed, and his body trembled with



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excitement. 'What a business!' he cried in a fervid whisper. 'Is n't it exciting? You can't tell her now: the thing has gone too far.'

The duty that had looked difficult enough in London was impossible here. Would my interposition stay the Little Mother's hand? Would it stop the building of this preposterous Sun Temple? No! the time for intervention was past.

Mayfair read my decision in my face, and smiled.

Then the door of the bungalow opened, and the Little Mother came towards us. Her step was light. Her eyes shone. Although we had been separated for a year her greeting was casual, as if we had met daily. As for Mayfair, she seemed quite to have forgotten his admirable existence. Of his services to the paper she said not a word. Happiness — great happiness — was marked in every line of her face.

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She grasped my hand, and then, waving her left arm towards the east, cried, 'Behold!' I looked, and saw, advancing down the Avenue of Colossi, a procession of priests — white robed, white turbaned. Some carried braziers of fire, others bore jars upon their left shoulders. As the procession advanced, the priests who bore the jars fell away on either side to water the little meadows of white flowers. At the same time the other priests placed a brazier of fire in the laps of each Colossus. The task completed, the procession reformed, wound upwards again, and disappeared over the crest of the hill.

'Come,' said the Little Mother, and stepped out briskly towards the silver gates. They were guarded by two priests, who, at a word from her, threw them open. We passed in, and came abreast of the first of the colossal figures. He sat erect upon a rough stone seat, feet resting upon the ground, great hands folded, solemn head facing the east so that the early rays

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of the rising sun would fall upon his face. I stood against one of these mammoth emblems of eternal silence. My head just reached his knees. Carved on the back of the chair in which he sat was the name — Zoroaster.

These solitary eastward-gazing figures made an indelible impression upon me. I recall the names as I read them in the quiet afternoon light. The selection was catholic to a degree. I remember Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, Socrates, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Christ, Shakespeare, Goethe, two popes, Rousseau, Kant, Comte, Darwin, and Huxley. The company was not quite complete. There were vacant places near the Propylon, where the Avenue ceased. Emerson was lying on his side, preparatory to being slung into position, and Browning and Tennyson had just been brought to the spot in lorries.

‘They’ve left out Martin Tupper,’ Mayfair whispered. I did not smile. I

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was watching the Little Mother. Her entire sensibility was focussed in her eyes, and in truth the spectacle that outspread before us was one to fire the imagination.

Against a blue sea stretched the Sun Temple. Its glory was of size, but the glory of the Propylon, that stood in our line of vision, was the glory of magnificence. From top to base it was clothed with a garment of gold plates that shone and sparkled like sunlight upon disturbed water. This magnificent object stood by itself some hundred yards beyond the last of the Colossi, and the same distance from the gate of the Temple.

We stared like awe-struck children. Even Mayfair was silenced. The Little Mother closed her eyes as if in prayer and thankfulness. Then without speaking she stalked back to the bungalow.

It was a most depressing dinner that followed. Our hostess alternated between fits of ecstatic silence, marked by a high colour and a twitching mouth, and dithy-

rambics about the Temple and the wonders that the next midsummer morning would bring. My head buzzed, and she herself could hardly sit still for excitement. There was but one burden to her monologues — the Temple, the Temple, the Temple. Her excitement increased as the evening waned, and when at last taking the cue that had been offered me a dozen times, I expressed a wish to look upon the Temple again before night-fall, she rose to the bait like a gudgeon. May-fair pleaded fatigue.

In the Avenue of Colossi the reflections from the flames of the brazier fell upon her face. I pitied her. She was so small, so mistaken. She looked so gullible, yet so lovable in her plain black old-fashioned gown, with the loose sleeves pulled tight at the wrists, and the wide ends of her girdle falling almost to her knees. And she looked so unlike the richest woman in the world, whose name was a byword for folly in half a hundred newspapers.

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When she stooped to straighten a flower bent by the wind, I saw how diaphanous her hand had grown. Blue markings radiated from her wrist like the lines on a veined stone.

We were undisturbed. The wing of the Sun Temple which we were now approaching was finished. There was no near sound but the faint rustle of meadows of flowers. All else — murmur of voices, clang of metal upon metal, whistle of steam engines — came to us but dimly, as in a house sounds from another room.

‘Is there any analogy between the flowers and the Colossi?’ I asked.

‘Yes, indeed,’ she answered joyfully, ‘the Colossi are here to the memory of the Great Dead. The flowers were planted in gratitude to all the Forgotten and Obscure. Each flower represents at least one sincere mental effort, one kind deed, one generous thought, one brave achievement, one unselfish action. It is wonderful to think that God has permitted me to do

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this. His name be praised. That he should——'

She ceased speaking, for at that moment we turned the crest of the hill, and the Propylon, focussed like a jewel in the eye of the setting sun, sprang into our vision. We entered a small door at the base. Slowly we ascended the interminable steps. When we reached the summit and stepped out upon the wide entablature, there was the prodigious Sun Temple sprawling before us. As I gazed the rim of the sun slipped below the horizon, and at that moment a chorus of priests appeared upon the balcony encircling the great white dome. Some carried braziers which they swung to and fro; others caught the fire in their hands and tossed it to the heavens.

Then a cannon boomed, the priests disappeared, and my gaze fell upon the great gate of the Sun Temple.

## CHAPTER XII

### A WAY OF ESCAPE FROM THE SANCTUARY

**I**T was similar in form to the Propylon, but of stone. On either side sculptured figures of men and women hung — pathetic nude figures, their fingers, knees, and toes making desperate clutches at the unyielding surface. They huddled like frightened sheep, with agonised faces raised entreatingly to something above. To what?

Gradually *It* resolved itself into the semblance of a gigantic figure. His knees touched, his heels were apart, the entrance to the Temple being formed by the space between. His legs, arms, and chest were well defined, but the head and shoulders had been barely touched by the chisel. Their form was indicated, that was all, as if the sculptor had shrunk from



the task of attempting to anthropomorphise the Ancient of Days. In his head two deep eyes stared sightlessly, but the agonised mortals who were striving to ascend the supports of the rude throne on which he was seated were far below their line of vision. The Little Mother kept her face averted from the gateway of the Temple, and she would not permit those pitiful figures to claim my attention overlong.

‘No, no!’ she whispered, ‘*that* represents what *was*. Soon, soon it will be swept away, and a new and glorious gateway will rise in its stead. Then shall men and women no longer seek His face in vain. *He has promised*. And I—I—have been an instrument in this, the last and greatest of His revelations. Oh, it is too wonderful!’ With that her body began to sway, and finally she broke into song. ‘O let the nations be glad and sing for joy,’ she began: ere she had reached ‘govern the nations upon earth,’ I was

descending the steps of the Propylon. It was not a spectacle for other eyes.

I walked to the Temple gateway and peered through into the darkness—the tremendous narrow darkness of the aisle. Then I went exploring into the shouting, hammering, and whistling; into the wilderness of unfinished courts, roofless halls, and recumbent columns; into the region of dense smoke and furnace fires, into a Babel of tongues, and the polyglot army of workmen. It was here a hand gripped my shoulder.

‘My benefactor!’ cried a hoarse voice, and the hairy body of Antonio Babb proceeded to embrace me. ‘My benefactor,’ he repeated, ‘Mr. — I forget your name — but my benefactor. Behold your most humble and most obedient servant.’ He bowed low. Warned by a glint in his eye that he was about to embrace me again, I stepped aside and said by way of cloaking my discourtesy: ‘A wonderful building, Mr. Babb.’

He grinned, clapped his hands upon the hood of the perambulator, and swept away from me at a great speed. From group to group of workmen, the odd figure — gesticulating, commanding, entreating — darted, and as he pursued a concentric path, it followed that within ten minutes, breathless and heated, he was drawing again to my side. While a score of yards still separated us, he cried :

‘Yes ; as you say, it’s a devilish remarkable building, and to think it’s old Antonio Babb who ’ll set the world ablaze. By thunder, Mr. What’s Your Name, I’m a proud man this day.’

‘What will they do with the Sun Temple when it is built ?’ I asked innocently.

He laid a grimy finger over his mouth, and winked a black eye. ‘Ask the tall yellow homunculus, who walks like a panther, and purrs like a pussy when he’s pleased. I never knew his name, so I can’t forget it. Ha ! ha ! the tall yellow homunculus said to old Antonio Babb,

“Build thus!” and Antonio Babb builded, but, like the judicious Hooker, he was quietly inquisitive — why this was, and that was. Ha! ha!’

‘Well, and what did you discover?’ I asked.

His hand swept towards the Temple buildings, laughter shaking him. ‘Courts, columns, lakes, colossi, what do they all mean? That,’ snapping his fingers. ‘Oh, the big yellow homunculus knows a thing or two. He ain’t studied Eastern architecture for nothing. This temple (Antonio Babb’s temple, hooray! hooray! hooray!) is oriented to the rising sun at the summer solstice. See? Consequently, at sunrise on the morning of the 21st of next June, if it don’t rain, a narrow beam of light will flash down the long dark aisle of the Temple from gate to sanctuary. There it will remain for a minute or so, then darkness again. Imagine, Mr. What’s Your Name, the effect of this burst of light — say, upon a jewel placed upon the high

altar — blackness all around. Why, the people will think the jewel's *alive*. It'll be another miracle. See!'

'What will happen?'

He laughed hoarsely and rattled the perambulator vehemently upon the causeway.

'Red ruin, Mr. What's Your Name, damned red ruin! the wolves will fall upon the lambs. Ha! ha! And the lambs will be slaughtered, all but two or three, who'll escape through the foresight of that old moustache — Antonio Babb!'

Whereupon, with a sudden propulsion of his long arms, he made the perambulator leap forward. I panted after him like Time. A mad dance he led me. We skirted a lake of fish as large as young seals, their tails decorated with strings of coloured beads, through courts where daylight only glimmered, past monoliths and carven figures till we came to the outer wall of the Temple. It hung upon the

cliff's edge, which drops sheer down several hundred feet. Antonio Babb lay flat upon his face, and bade me do likewise.

The cliff was ravaged like an old Stilton cheese. It was too dark to distinguish details, but I dimly perceived, far below, the foam of lashed waters, and I heard the hollow roar of breaking waves.

Suddenly the architect sprang to his feet, and, motioning me to follow, he retreated a dozen yards inland and jumped into a gulley that ran by the side of the Temple. It continued for a dozen yards, and was then stopped by a buttress. He lifted a trap door, and fastening the wheel of the perambulator to the ring, proceeded to climb, or rather slide, down a short ladder. I followed, and stumbled along a damp passage, finally to emerge in a natural gallery of rock perched about half-way down the cliff. He struck a light, and peering over I saw far below a boat beached on the strand of a miniature lagoon, which was

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connected with the sea by a narrow strait of water. The lagoon was as smooth as the lake in Battersea Park.

Antonio dug me in the ribs. 'A little way of escape' (he intoned the words as if they were recitative in an opera) 'for the dear lady who has made old Antonio a rich man, and for you, too, most solemn and bountiful Mæcenæ. Antonio is no weasel. They don't catch him asleep. Ho! ho! — What's that?'

A great shouting, followed by the report of a gun, reached us from the upper world. My companion sprang to his feet, swarmed the ladder, seized the perambulator, and rushed off towards the tumult. I followed, but in spite of his lameness and the hindrance of the perambulator, he easily outpaced me. Still I persevered, and was close to the disturbance when somebody hailed me from the darkness. It was Mayfair.

'Keep your hair on,' he remarked, 'it's only a fight between a couple of

Hindoos. Now I want to talk to you about the boat in which we escape when Cap'n Tremayne and his merry men bombard the Temple.'

'What boat?' I asked.

'Why, the boat the egregious Babb has just shown you. You did n't know that I followed you down the trap and was within ten feet of you all the time. By Jove, the old gentleman can run. He as near as possible fell over me. I suppose it did n't occur to your practical mind to consider how one is to step into a boat two hundred feet below the ankle.'

'Ropes — rope ladders,' I suggested.

'Try again,' he replied, 'why, even I could n't resist shooting if I saw you dangling on a rope ladder. No, that would n't do. There's a passage connecting the lagoon with some secret chamber of the Temple, you bet. That passage must be discovered and explored. It's a fine night,' he added; 'what do you say to a sail?'



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‘Agreeable,’ I replied, yet not without hesitation, for I guessed his intention, and secret passages do not attract me. ‘If you’ll land me at St. Wees pier before midnight.’

‘Never fear,’ he laughed : ‘but we won’t sail straight for St. Wees.’

We engaged a boat at the Red River landing stage, and Mayfair, who was an excellent seaman, at once headed her due east. Around us everything was hushed, but on our right, under a lurid canopy, the myriad noises of the encampment came to us like the murmur of bees in a garden.

We glided on, coasting slowly round the nail of The Finger, but I could detect no opening in the swirl of foam that eddied and leapt about the rocks. Suddenly Mayfair whistled, used his bow oar vigorously, and in another minute we were gliding up a passage between high walls of cliff, where the water was black, deep, and still. It was a natural inlet protected

from the fusillade of the waves by a breakwater of sunken rocks. Along this sequestered channel we glided, till our prow nuzzled upon the shore. The darkness was that of a catacomb, and it was by touch rather than sight that we drew our skiff above the water-mark alongside the boat which Antonio Babb had disclosed to me from the gallery above our heads.

A low iron door in the cliff confronted us. It was unlocked, opened outwards, and disclosed a gentle incline. It bore no resemblance to the secret passage of history. The walls were not oozy, the floor was not slimy, the atmosphere was not noisome. It was just a modern basement corridor, with walls of white glazed tiles, and electric lights at regular intervals.

We closed the door behind us and began the ascent. It was a most agreeable method of exploration; but after we had walked some ten minutes my confidence waned, for the electric lamps ceased,

and we were obliged to feel through the darkness, our eyes fixed upon a glimmer of light that filtered towards us.

That light signalised the end of our journey. It shone through a grating let into the wall of a circular chamber at about the height of a tall man's eyes. I observed that a flight of steps descended upon our right. These details I took in at a glance as we crossed the floor of the circular chamber. We peered together through the grating.

Before us was the Sanctuary of the Sun Temple.

At first I saw nothing but a dazzling gate on the opposite side of the Sanctuary studded with scintillating yellow stones. This gem-bedecked barrier separated the Sanctuary from the Temple, whose vast aisle and vaster recesses loomed beyond.

The Sanctuary — conical in shape — was lighted dimly by a swinging lamp. The walls were smooth and the colour of silver. Benches of a similar metal ran

round the left side, and upon them were seated, erect, motionless, watchful, the seven Orientals who guarded the Enchanted Stone. A low open doorway pierced the wall to the right.

In the centre stood a squat golden throne, looking like the wool-sack in the House of Lords, and before it stood a pedestal, and on the pedestal King Nara's skinny hand, supported by the seven golden pilasters, clawed the air.

The Enchanted Stone, black as a slug, lay between his thumb and finger.

Upon the squat throne the Child — pale martyr — was seated. Her back was towards us. I could see only her hair, the colour of half-ripened barley. The Yellow Man crouched at her feet. Her head reached no higher than King Nara's hand.

The only sound that broke the silence was the shuffling of the priests' feet, whose figures moved to and fro in the aisle of the Temple. I can see them now — those

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restless robes, those shaven heads, those hairless faces bobbing and bending before that weary child.

We turned away. Disgust seized me. I did not speak as we retraced our steps nor during the little voyage across the bay.

‘Well, this is good-bye for the present,’ I said moodily to Mayfair, as I stepped ashore at St. Wees. ‘I must return to London to-morrow.’ My manner, I know, was not cordial, but my heart was bitter against him for his share in this colossal folly.

‘Ta! ta!’ he answered lightly, ‘I shall sail back to the Red River.’

Next morning I returned to London, promising myself that I would never again set foot in Cornwall, or, at any rate, till the next midsummer morning.

## CHAPTER XIII

I BID GOOD-BYE TO THE LITTLE MOTHER

WE exchanged many letters, but I did not see Mayfair. He gave up his work on *The Bee*, protesting that he could not leave Cornwall, while I persuaded myself that I could not be spared from London.

‘It’s a Paradise or a Prison,’ he wrote, early in the year, ‘I shall be in at the death.’

Months passed. The momentous day drew near. The Finger began to beckon. I proposed starting on the 19th of June, but my departure was hastened by a telegram I received from Mayfair on the morning of the 17th. ‘Come immediately,’ it ran. ‘Little Mother very ill, wishes to see you.’

Within two hours I was at Paddington, and duly arrived at Junction-town, in the

late afternoon. In crossing the bridge to reach the local train, I met Antonio Babb, the perambulator trailing from one hand and several brown paper parcels clutched in the other. He looked very knowing.

‘What — returning to London?’ said I.

‘Ah! Well met, Most Noble Mæce-nas!’ cried he. ‘Yes, Antonio returns to the gay city. He sows. Others reap. Antonio leaves the whirlwind behind him. Ho! ho! ho!’

With that he gave me a profound bow and scurried across the bridge, the perambulator bumping on the boards, and the parcels dangling against his long legs. That was the last I saw of that eccentric. But you did your duty, egregious Babb, and you were amusing! What more is required?

I travelled to St. Wees in the company of five Orientals. The sun-symbol was tattooed upon their arms. As the train wound round the bay, and the Sun Tem-

ple sprang broadside to view, their excitement was wonderful to behold.

They stretched trembling hands towards the golden cupolas, they raised thin brown arms to the great white dome ; they uttered cries of delight, and, as their jubilant voices ascended, tears of joy streamed down their faces.

In truth there was reason for their ecstasy. Was not this Temple — mystic, wonderful — the visible sign of the fulfilment of that Promise for which their forebears had yearned? Millions had died in faith, but these — these five who shared with me a third-class carriage of the branch railway to St. Wees — beheld ! Yes, there was reason for their ecstasy.

Even I was taken out of myself. The thing was so unique, so uncommon, so wonderful, and it meant so much. Dear God, how much it meant !

And how beautiful it looked — this younger brother of the sun ! Of the sun that foundered daily in the blue



waters of that magic ocean, for magical the ocean seemed on that still night, and magical the night for me. Did not every pulse of the engine bring me nearer Mayfair?

Those moments were exquisite, but I will not linger. Let me describe the spectacle. First the blue bay, and the embroidery of white foam edging the yellow sand that bordered the mighty Finger. To the west, overshadowing all, the great white sanctuary dome, then the hundred golden cupolas blazing eastwards along the ridge, poised over high columns and wide courts, ceasing only at the gate of the Temple in the shadow of the rough-hewn tremendous figure of the Deity. Then a space, the Propylon standing solitary in the midst of it, and beyond that the winding avenue, carpeted with flowers, guarded by Colossi, and so down to the silver gates and the Red River encampment white with the canvas of many tents.

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The slowing of the train drove into my reverie, and as we slipped into the station there was Mayfair.

We were quite demonstrative.

‘Well?’ said I, as we walked up the hill, ‘what news? How is the Little Mother?’

Mayfair sighed.

‘She may live to see another sunrise, perhaps two, but no more. That’s her latest whim, to watch the sun rise and set. Look! You can see her this very moment, if your eyes are good.’

I threw a rapid glance towards the Temple.

‘Well, if you can’t quite see her, you can see the place where she lies.’

I stared at him interrogatively.

‘In a tent on the top of the Propylon.’

‘She lives in a tent on the Propylon?’ said I.

‘That’s about the size of it,’ cried he. ‘A bed has been rigged up there. Two, in fact; the other for a nurse. Poor lady!’

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‘And you, have you been well?’

‘Ripping!’

‘How have things gone here?’

‘Troublously! Constant fights between the Cornishmen and the Orientals. The Mayor talks of telegraphing for soldiers.’

‘The lot who travelled with me were peaceable enough,’ I said.

‘Oh, the Orientals are peaceable enough when left to themselves, but the Cornishmen won’t leave ’em alone — and there are such a mighty lot of ’em. I calculate they arrive here at the rate of about a thousand a day.’

The Orientals swarmed so thickly in the narrow, hilly streets of St. Wees, that the road to Mayfair’s lodgings was impassable. We took a circuitous route through little country lanes, passing on our way a small building that was new to me. We paused a moment.

‘You observe St. Wees is progressive,’ said Mayfair. ‘That’s the new crematorium. It’s the Little Mother’s doing.’

## Good-Bye to the Little Mother 225

The people don't like it, but she insisted. I guess she'll be the first and the last for a generation, anyhow. Poor lady!'

After dinner we drew our chairs to the window and gazed at the ever-shifting pageant beneath; when our eyes grew tired of that spectacle we rested them upon the great repose of the Sun Temple. Suddenly a flame leapt from the Propylon and burned brightly for some seconds.

'The Yellow Man's signal,' cried Mayfair. 'I guess you're wanted. Here, take the glass.'

I adjusted the telescope and perceived him standing upon the Propylon. The walls of the tent had been pulled apart, and I could distinguish the figure of the Little Mother reclining upon a couch. Her face was turned from the Yellow Man, who was talking vigorously.

'He don't like her secession,' said Mayfair.

'*What?*' I cried.

‘Her secession. Her apostasy! Did n’t I tell you she’s ’verted?’

I gazed at him in astonishment. ‘Do you mean to say,’ I cried, ‘that she no longer believes in the midsummer morning Revelation, that she has gone back on all that?’ waving my head towards the Sun Temple.

‘Yes, gone clean back! She’s no longer a Sister of the Sun. But you’ll hear all about it presently — immediately. See that little steamer puffing across the bay. That’s for you. Let’s walk down to the quay and meet her.’

Sorrowfully I accompanied him. Life, at the moment, seemed an ineffectual, hopeless kind of business. I averted my face from that monument of folly, fraud, and superstition. Yet, by what right did I talk of fraud and superstition? Had I not twice seen the devilry of that antic stone? If ocular proof of two miracles had been mine, why should I doubt the possibility of a third?

## Good-Bye to the Little Mother 227

When we reached the harbour the little steamer was waiting at the quay. 'Now, my buck,' cried Mayfair (sometimes he was a little coarse), 'jump in! You'll see me along later.'

As we steamed across the bay, the orderly character of everything impressed me. From the first of the Colossi to the Sanctuary dome there was no sign of life. The builders, the masons, the carpenters, the workers, in gold and silver, had brought their labours to an end. Not a scaffold pole, not a stray block of marble, not even a heap of rubble remained.

The Sun Temple was finished.

The Brothers of the Sun had come into their kingdom.

The Red River encampment was metamorphosed. The booths, the stalls, the stores were gone: the shouting, the screaming, the hammering, the laughter — all the jolly noises of labour were hushed. Tents covered the encampment. Grave, turbaned figures, their complexions the colour

of ebony, of old bronze, of sand in shadow, walked to and fro. There was no noise.

The Brothers of the Sun had come into their kingdom.

I landed, passed through the silver gates, ascended the Avenue of Colossi, and with heavy feet and a dulled heart climbed the dark spiral staircase of the Propylon. Pushing open the swing door at the top, I was confronted, not by the prospect rolling away to infinity, and the caress of a summer wind, but by the canvas wall of a huge tent. A door with an electric bell—like a little eye in the wooden jamb—faced me. In response to my signal, it was opened by a maid in mob-cap and apron, who conducted me to an ante-room. The window was open, and while waiting the Little Mother's pleasure I surveyed my environment.

Recall to your mind the roadway in front of the National Gallery; imagine a line drawn from the eastern and western extremities of the building to the terrace,

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and in that oblong space you have the size of the Propylon. A railing ran round the extreme edge. Two tents stood there, or rather the ante-room of the marquee, where I waited, and a smaller one to the right, the side of which I could just distinguish. Presently the maid entered and beckoned.

The Little Mother, muffled up, was seated in a chair which stood in front of the smaller tent. And so changed. The pallor of her face was transparent; her eyes shone with that glittering, trembling wonder seen sometimes in the eyes of children and poets, and beneath them lurked those brown depressions that herald fatality. How tiny she looked in the immense arch of the sky! Somewhere in the warm, still air a bell tinkled. The rest was silence, to be broken by the slight sound of her voice, beautiful even in its weakness.

I bent over. A sudden impulse prompted me to kiss her. She smiled,



and whispered, 'You were good to come — when — when I wanted you.'

I could not speak. The pity of it choked the commonplace of my comment.

'Close! close!' she whispered. 'My voice is very weak, and I have much to say.'

I knelt, and placed my head near to her lips.

'I shall not see the Great Sunrise,' she murmured. 'Before midsummer morning I shall be beyond the longing for revelation — past even the need of love. Now listen, my friend, to my last request. When I die — it will be very soon — my desire is that my body be cremated. On the morning that follows my death you will stand here at sunrise, and you will scatter my ashes to the rising sun. That will be the end of the mortal part of me. But I shall not wholly die. You remember what Shakespeare makes Cleopatra say? — "I am fire and air; my other elements I give to baser life," and again, ah!

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— “I have immortal longings in me. Immortal longings, Im-m-or-tal long-ings.”

Then she dropped again into silence. Spiritual intimacies voyaged across her face.

‘It is dogma that kills,’ she cried suddenly. ‘God speaks to the soul, not to the eye. To frame His message into creeds is spiritual death. His revelation is perpetual, but it is intimate — personal. Why should He give signs to the transitory eye, when He is always speaking to the eternal soul of us, if we will but listen.

‘Bend nearer,’ she whispered, ‘nearer, nearer. There will be no revelation on midsummer morning. The truth has come to me at last; in the solitary hours I have lain here with nothing between me and Him. Closer! closer! He has *revealed Himself to me.*’

I took the wasted hand in mine. The fingers crawled up the sleeve of my coat, till they held my arm as in a vice. A

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change, too, came over her face. It was now no longer grey. The sunken pits about the corners of the eyes were uplifted, the orbs shone, and the features were radiant.

‘Nearer, nearer, in your ear. There will be no revelation on midsummer morning. Revelation has neither time nor place. The pure in heart see God daily, but not with the mortal eye. The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, “Lo here! or lo there!” for behold the Kingdom of God is within you.’

She lay back with a happy sigh, then her hands came together on her breast. ‘It has taken me a lifetime to find out this,’ she said. ‘I looked for him with my eyes. Poor blind eyes! And these my people I have misled, God forgive me, they too must learn what I have learnt—at last.

‘I have sometimes thought,’ she continued, caught up suddenly by another

side wind of emotion, 'that there is no God now.'

I raised my hands in protest. Was this distracted soul never to reach finality?

She swept on, voluble even in her weakness, 'God willed that the elements should combine in the germ from which all life has sprung. He saw the end from the beginning, he saw the ages roll away, and man, the crown of his work, walking to and fro upon the earth. But the man that he saw was but a cunning artificer without the moral sense. Then, I think God was sorry. Oh, it grieves me to think that God was sorry.'

I was glad Mayfair was not present. There was something terribly pathetic in this lonely old lady being sorry for God.

'God was sorry,' the Little Mother continued, 'sorry for man, because he was only man. There was but one way by which man could be made divine. God must give Himself to man — to each man a spark of His own divinity. That was

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the Great Sacrifice. For God, having given Himself to man, became non-existent. He gave Himself, content to believe that man in some perfect time would restore Him, would redeem the priceless gift. Do not the good when they die return their souls to Him? Thus is God being recreated, and is it not possible to believe that in the course of ages such vast numbers will have restored their souls to God, that He will accept the gift and reign again in heaven? Does not that explain the awful injustice of the world? If God existed, would many things which are now permitted be permitted? Would He have allowed Christ to be crucified, or the saints to be burnt? But He is not in the heavens, He is in *us*. I believe this, I am sure of it. If I were well and strong I would have it formulated. I would have a book written about it. I would——'

'It's dogma that kills,' I said.

'Oh! oh! That, too, would be dogma.'

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Poor lady, in a flash she realised her inconsistency. 'Yes, yes: that was always my failing,' she moaned. 'It is too late to change now. Nevertheless, it is dogma that kills. I am sure of that. What have I really learned during my life? Only a few truisms about conduct: that seemly living brings its own reward; that heaven and hell are within us; that the pure in heart share the peace of God; that as we reap so we sow; and that God plays no tricks. Those great souls' (pointing to the Colossi) 'knew no more than that, and our golden day is when we discover that our little experiments in righteousness harmonise with their teaching. Oh, my friend, I have blundered all my life. It is only now, at bedtime, that I begin to see clearly.'

After that I think her mind wandered a little, for she talked of her childhood, spoke of gathering flowers, and called on strange names with great affection. Soon she closed her eyes. All below and

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around was still. Little sounds fell faintly upon the ear — the cry of a bird, the wail of a child, a sheep bleating, and, nearer, the wind tugging at the tent walls. Suddenly I felt a little pull at my arm. 'I have been thinking,' she said, 'and — and I have changed my mind again. Away out yonder' (pointing to the mainland), 'is a meadow on a hill. It is called Caroline's field. Anyone will show it to you. In the spring it is purple with wild pansies. As a child it was my playing place, for the best flowers grew there. The soil had been nourished and nourished till the good earth was rich and black. It is there, there, my friend, that I wish my ashes to be laid, there in the nice wholesome earth, whither we come, whence we go. In Caroline's field you will hide all that is left of the Little Mother.'

She looked pleadingly at me.

I promised.

While she was speaking the arc of the sun dipped below the horizon. Suddenly

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the boom of a cannon reverberated through the still air, and, as if in answer to that signal, a white-robed priest appeared in each of the hundred balconies that circled the golden domes. The priests carried censers which they swung to and fro, and at each movement of the vessels a tongue of flame spurted skywards. As the sun sank, their movements became more rapid, the censers swinging in crescendo till the moment when it disappeared below the horizon. Then each priest fell upon his knees, the cannon was again fired, and from the summit of the Sanctuary dome a glorious multi-coloured flame flared towards the heavens. The flame died out, the sun was no more, but the sky remained very light, and over the place where the sun had disappeared, a pale planet hung in the quiet sky. The afterglow lingered. It changed the yellow sands to liquid gold; it glorified the window-panes of Junction-town into diamonds; it made a magic ocean of the sea; and it gave to the Little



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Mother's face a light that was very, very beautiful. Then her lips opened. 'If death is annihilation, then I say that to die is gain, for eternity is then only a single night. But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, what joy can be greater than this?'

'It will be good either way,' I said.

'Either way,' she repeated: 'either way. But I wonder, will there be much joy in meeting the dead, or even in meeting God? What is joy? There, there, I am beginning to have doubts again. That was always the way with me. Doubts! Doubts! Doubts!'

She raised herself upon her elbow; her eager face swept the heavens: 'Take me now, O God,' she cried, 'take me while I still believe.'

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MARCH TO THE SUN TEMPLE

**T**HE Little Mother died during the night — died with these words upon her lips: ‘I was tossed about by every wind, but yet I was steered by Thee, though very secretly.’

At dawn of midsummer eve I ascended the Propylon. The tents had been removed and the floor was strewn with flowers. Set in their midst was a small urn. A few stars still lingered in the luminous sky.

I lifted the urn from the ground, descended to the Red River quay, chartered a boat, and pulled across the bay towards the distant hill where the fruitful meadow lay. Bits of scarlet cloud flecked themselves over the sky like poppies in a cornfield. Then streaks of blue and green peeped out and stretched themselves

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along the horizon, and the bits of scarlet cloud became islands of gold.

The last of the pale stars blinked itself out, dawn stole upwards, and the rim of the sun started from the horizon.

I found the fruitful meadow, and there in the rich earth I hid all that was mortal of the Little Mother. Close by grew a cluster of small white flowers. One of these I dug up by the roots. Then I returned to St. Wees, left a message at Mayfair's lodgings bidding him meet me at the Red River quay in two hours' time, and once more set my face towards the Temple.

For another, a last, duty remained — to plant a flower to her memory. When that tender symbol of the Little Mother's goodness had taken its place among the other flowers on the Avenue of the Colossi, I stood for some minutes, sad and solitary, thinking of many things. While I thus gazed over the wide prospect that gradually rolled from the morn-

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ing mists, I became aware of movement upon a brown upland that rose from the verge of the distant country.

It was as if a regiment of dolls was holding a field day. Presently a flag flashed and flapped in the sun, and the signal was answered from a neighbouring hill. That changed my mood, and set me to immediate action.

Descending, I hastened to the Red River quay, where I found Mayfair waiting for me.

He was all eagerness and gaiety when I gave him the news.

‘I’ll be ready in a jiffy,’ he cried. ‘A field-glass hangs in the hall at the bungalow. Just fetch it, there’s a good fellow. I’ll go on straight to the Propylon.’

When I joined him on the summit he seized the glass, swept the hills, and then handed the telescope to me, whistling softly as he did so. My veins tingled when I saw the kind of surprise the Cornishmen were preparing for the Brothers

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of the Sun. This amateur army, drawn up in military order, was very variously accoutred. A few carried guns, but the majority were armed with sailors' knives or the borers and picks used by miners. A bag of stones was slung round the neck of each warrior, and in the wake of the army were rows of men smashing larger pieces of stone into fragments. Across the spur of the hill a wavering line of women and children stretched like a length of black cotton over a pillow. One end dipped into a quarry, the other trailed to the rear of the army, and along this line of human hands passed from one to the other the missiles of war. .

A detachment was being drilled in some very primitive manœuvre, and I could almost fancy I heard the words of command in Captain Daniel Tremayne's stentorian voice. Plainly I saw him shouting from the chair which his great hands drove backwards and forwards. Come to think of it, a strange sight to

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meet the eye at sunrise in an English country!

I glanced at Mayfair. 'Shall we warn the priests?'

He did not reply, but pointed towards the Temple. Following his indication, I saw the Yellow Man leave one of the buildings and descend stealthily to the silver gates.

'Daniel will need an epitaph sooner than he thinks, if he isn't quick,' said Mayfair. 'The Yellow Man is armed. Did you see the flash of jewels in his dagger haft? Look, the gates are moving. What's his game, I wonder?'

We were soon to learn. The opening of the silver gates was the signal for a concerted movement among the Orientals who dwelt in the tents on the Red River Encampment. Then, in single file, they entered the Temple precincts. Quite half an hour passed before the gates clanged to behind the last of the robed and turbaned figures, and during the

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operation the Yellow Man flitted among them, admonishing, directing, arranging.

‘I guess Daniel will need that epitaph,’ said Mayfair, reflectively. ‘Now we’ll visit his den.’

‘His den,’ cried I.

‘Why, certainly! What else did you expect? We see this through. Look! Daniel’s men are already on the move. Come!’

It went sorely against the grain, but what could I do? The reflection that the end must be very near comforted me. So we left the Propylon, and after a mouthful of breakfast set our faces towards the brown hill.

We crossed the encampment and settled down into a brisk five-miles-an-hour swing.

The road, as I have already said, skirts the dynamite factory, a baker’s dozen of squat buildings set like dog kennels among the yellow sand hills. When we drew into the horrid smells that encom-

pass this place I was surprised to see a number of men in the enclosure loading carts with packages of the explosive.

‘Odd,’ I muttered; ‘the rules are strict against the admission of strangers.’

Mayfair rubbed his chin reflectively; then illumination broke in his eyes, and rippled over his face.

‘Don’t you remember the Johannesburg affair? Fifty tons of dynamite in collision with a truck-load of caps. Result—a rent in the earth fifty yards long, and red ruin all around. Fifty tons of dynamite, and a truck of caps! See?’

‘Dare they?’

‘They’d dare anything that would spoil the heathen. To-night will see the biggest bonfire St. John’s Eve has ever known; which means trouble with the authorities. We must consider ourselves. My life is more precious than the lives of many Orientals. What do you propose?’



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‘First train back to London. We gain nothing by staying. Besides, I am anxious about *The Bee*.’

‘Oh, *The Bee* be damned. We’ve got the hive itself here! All we want is a plan of campaign — a plan that will ensure our safety, and front seats when the fun begins.’

He threw himself upon the grass by the roadside, tilted his hat over his eyes, and stared up at the cloudless sky.

I stood irresolute. A martial air played by a brass band came to me faintly from the direction of Junction-town. The road leading to The Finger was black with men marching four abreast. There was no need for us to put our heads into Daniel’s den. In two hours his army would be on us.

Suddenly Mayfair leaped to his feet.

‘I have it,’ he cried. ‘Here we are simply threepenny-bit units of a mob — a raging, ridiculous mob with the lust of slaughter hot on them. We shall see

nothing of the forest for the trees. Our place is behind the Sanctuary — at the end of Babb's secret passage. Best place for seeing and hearing, and tolerably safe in the event of the rioters winning.'

'About as safe as the engine-room of a battleship during an engagement,' I answered.

'Nonsense, man! In three minutes we can be afloat.'

'But if the priests purpose escaping that way *we* shall be trampled to death.'

Mayfair smiled knowingly.

'You have n't grasped the Yellow Man's methods. He alone is responsible for the safety of the Enchanted Stone and the preservation of the Child. He's a fighter, the sort of fellow who would sacrifice a column to gain a strategic position. What to him are the lives of a thousand priests as against the safety of the Enchanted Stone? No, no, my friend! There won't be any stampede of Orientals. They know of no secret passage. The stampede will

run to nothing more than a beaten, broken man with a black stone in his hand, and a frightened child clinging to his yellow neck. We'll let them get well away, and follow at our leisure in our own boat. Oh, what a time we shall have! I mean to get hold of that antic stone — good epithet, antic! Fancy showing it round on a sunny afternoon at Lord's — all a-glowing.'

'I don't like the plan at all. It seems to me that we are courting disaster — running into the jaws of——'

Mayfair ignored my protest. 'I must begin to scheme,' he said. 'First, the boat. Our expedition to Daniel's encampment must be given up. We'll go straight down to the Red River landing-stage instead, and engage a dingey to be ready at midnight. There's an old chap down there — a pensioner of the Little Mother's — who'll be glad to help us for her sake. He must be within hail from midnight onwards.'

‘How will you call him? He ’ll never hear you. Remember, we shall be in the thick of the battle.’

‘My bicycle bell,’ he cried gaily, linking his arm into mine. ‘Have n’t you observed how successfully the tinkle pierces the world’s noises? Now for the Red River.’

The quay was deserted save for a blue-eyed boatman — weather-blown and battered — who was gazing disconsolately across the bay. He was the poor remnant of many long-shoremen who, during the building of the Temple, had grown rich ferrying people across the bay to St. Wees.

‘Yes, I ’ll do it for the Little Mother’s sake,’ he replied, in answer to Mayfair’s request. ‘I be of her party because her was she. I rowed her acrost the bay five and fifty years ago. ’Ere, sir?’

I stepped to his side.

‘Maybe you ’ve ’eard of the butcher Steele.’

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I regretted my ignorance.

‘Him was the chap as the Duchess kissed, when she went electioneering.’

I nodded sympathetically.

‘The Little Mother kissed me good-bye the other night.’

Tears blurred his blue eyes. He brushed his sleeve over them.

‘It’s a mercy Providence took her afore *that* happened.’

We looked enquiringly at the old man.

‘What do you mean?’ said Mayfair.

‘Can’t you see? They’ve set fire to her ‘ome.’

We faced round to St. Wees. The flames were leaping from the windows of Perseverance House.

‘First blood to the Cornishmen,’ cried Mayfair. ‘It makes a fine blaze.’

‘It makes a fine blaze,’ echoed the boatman. ‘Poor lady! I’m ‘alf glad she be dead. It would ‘a’ broke her heart to know her own people had done it. Mayor would have telegraphed for the red-coats

if the Cap'n's men had n't cut the wires. I learn as how they've broken up a mile of the railway beyond Junction-town. Mayor will be sending a horseman to Penzance, I reckon.'

Mayfair plucked at my sleeve. His feet moved impatiently. 'The rabble are on the march,' he said, 'we'll meet 'em.'

As we turned away from the Red River I looked back, curious to see the effect of the burning mansion upon the Brothers of the Sun. Like a hop-field in the wind, they swayed through the length and breadth of the Temple domain. The holocaust heralded the peril that hung over them; and as the flames leaped about the turrets of Perseverance House, they drew closer to one another like scared sheep.

Hardly had we walked a dozen paces when the roof of Perseverance House fell in with a rush of fire and smoke.

Mayfair threw his hat into the air. 'My aunt,' he cried. 'Oh, but this is

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jolly!’ Neither death in the past nor death to come could damp his spirits; but he was soon obliged to desist, for our route was beginning to be thronged by an ever-increasing crowd with faces set towards the Temple. As the only travellers walking in the opposite direction, we attracted attention. Quick eyes, flashing white in the sun from the burnt faces of fishermen, darted glances at us. Miners — sullen, slouching, clay-stained — scowled. So insistent did these attentions become that, when we reached Dynamite village (the mushroom little town was still called Dynamite village), I persuaded Mayfair to retreat into the brand-new stucco inn that had been run up in the main street. The bar parlour was empty. The Cornishmen were in no mood for drinking or loafing, and it was from behind the starched muslin curtains of the saloon bar that we watched the citizen army marching towards the Sun Temple. They moved well, and in spite of their amateur martialness and

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their childish accoutrements, looked like men who could give a good account of themselves.

‘But they could n’t stand an hour against trained soldiers,’ I said aloud.

‘They would n’t stand a minute if the sojers fired,’ Mayfair retorted.

Just then a fine commotion uprose somewhere in the rear of the column, beyond the range of our eyes. Shouts and cheers rent the air, and the men who were passing our windows half faced round, curious to know the cause of the uproar; but although their pace slackened, they did not break rank, and so it followed that in a few seconds the commotion was abreast of us. Captain Daniel Tremayne was the cause. His chair had been reversed, so that he faced the marching army. Ropes encircled the back of it; the ends were tied around the waists of half a dozen miners, who, with bent bodies and streaming faces, rattled their captain along the white road. Tremayne himself had fallen



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upon his swollen knees, and in a voice so husky that the purport eluded me, harangued his followers. Suddenly, as if conscious of the futility of speech in that din, he broke into a hymn. The multitude caught up the refrain; the men who were dragging the chair quickened; enthusiasm passed like a wind from rank to rank, and on they swept towards the Temple, singing, shouting, grasping each other's hands, patting one another on the back, flinging their arms around neighbouring necks, in a whirl of dust and religious ardour. Their fervour was infectious. I was touched. They marched so gaily to an undertaking where personal gain was naught, and the risk of hard knocks, and possibly a terrible death, enormous. Even the doggerel of the hymns they sang became impressive.

“Hear him, ye deaf, his praise, ye dumb,  
Your loosened tongues employ;  
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,  
And hop, ye lame, for joy.

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“ Look unto him, ye nations, own  
Your God, ye fallen race ;  
Look, and be saved through faith alone,  
Be justified by grace.

“ Shall I — amidst a ghastly band,  
Dragged to the judgment seat —  
Far on the left with horror stand,  
My fearful doom to meet ?

“ Oh no, I still may turn and live,  
For still his wrath delays ;  
He now vouchsafes a kind reprieve,  
And offers me his grace.”

In the excitement of the humn-singing and the passing of Captain Tremayne I had drawn close to the window. Mayfair — reckless Mayfair — his body outstretched half-way over the sash, his long arms dangling, was applauding and encouraging the singers as if they were lion comiques at a music hall, when a stone whizzed past his head and cracked against a mirror in the room. Another followed, and yet another, accompanied by a hail of gravel, while somebody shouted —

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‘Out with them — the tools of Belial.  
Smash the devils’ furniture,’ and voices  
sang hoarsely : —

“They have spilt his precious blood,  
Trampled on the Son of God.”

I dragged Mayfair back into the room. Moments of suspense followed ; but the threat was not pursued. There was confused talking, a temporary halt, angry enquiries as to the cause of the stoppage, answering cries, then the measured tread of feet began anew, and peeping from behind the curtain, I observed the column swinging on again in a cloud of dust towards the Temple. As I turned back into the room my face grimaced at me from the shattered mirror. It was livid. Mayfair was flecking sand from his waistcoat.

‘Bah,’ said he, ‘they throw like women.’

## CHAPTER XV

### THE STORMING OF THE SUN TEMPLE

**T**HE measured tramp of the tail of the army died away in the distance. Mayfair went steadily through his luncheon, ruminating between the mouthfuls. During the longer pauses he arranged crumbs of bread in geometrical figures upon the table cloth.

‘Comrade! what of the afternoon? How shall we spend it?’ he said at length. ‘Ah! A notion! You know the sand-hill by the dynamite factory. There’s a clump of rushes on the top big enough to hold a Sunday-school. That’s our place. It’ll be like sitting in the corner of a stage box. Unobserved, we’ll see everything. Come!’

Leaving the inn by the back door, we struck across the country. When we

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reached the base of the sand-hill, Mayfair clutched my arm and nodded towards the summit.

‘They rear big crows in this part of the country,’ he said, ‘look at them bobbing about in the rushes.’

‘Too large for crows,’ I remarked.

‘Ah, there’s no deceiving you.’

‘Why, it’s the de Gruchy orphan troop,’ he cried, and lifting his voice he hailed them.

The black coats became agitated as we drew near, and long legs untwisted themselves from the grass.

I held out my hand to the nearest, but he ignored the movement. They had formed themselves into a line facing us, their backs towards the Temple. The rushes swayed in the wind, tickling the tails of their frock coats. Lack-lustre eyes glanced with timid encouragement towards the orphan at the right (it was Emerson) as if the scene had been rehearsed, and they awaited the cue.

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Then he opened his lips, which trembled so much that the words were hardly audible.

‘We regret we cannot give ourselves the pleasure of your company, as we are on the point of returning to London,’ he said.

‘We can hardly express in sufficiently strong language our disapproval of the wicked waste of money upon the building of this Temple,’ added Number 2.

‘An extravagance sanctioned by you, sir’ (this to me), from Number 3.

‘And encouraged by you, sir’ (that to Mayfair), from Number 4.

Then they said in unison, ‘We wish you good-day, Gentlemen,’ bowed, and stalked down the hill.

Mayfair threw himself upon the ground with a shout of laughter, but I was in no mood for mirth. Yonder stood the dazzling Propylon, but, for all its wonder and beauty, a *memento mori* and nothing more. The strident hymns that came blaring

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from brass bands through the hot air set themselves ever to one refrain — ‘Dead, dead — the Little Mother is dead.’

But as the day wore on, my depression became intermittent, and later the clouds blew quite away, so absorbing was that shifting panorama. The railings that encircled the base of the Sun Temple hill formed a spider line of demarcation between the two armies. Within were the Brothers of the Sun, unconcerned, detached; without, the miners and fishermen raged like the gross spirits of Pandemonium, except that their ravings were ever praiseful of God and minatory to the heathen. They sang, they shouted, they knelt, they grasped each other’s hands, they wept upon one another’s shoulders, they doubled themselves over the railings, shaking furious arms at the Orientals. From group to group, in a whirl of din and disquiet, Captain Tremayne’s chair darted. Where he went, there enthusiasm rushed. And the camp

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parched beneath the glowing sun, and panted under a velarium of dust.

Beyond those voices, high above the fanfaronade of citizen war, in the still upper air, soared the golden cupolas of the Sun Temple, and higher still, hung the great dome, arching the spot where the Enchanted Stone lay waiting the sunrise.

Beneath us the squat buildings of the dynamite factory, like so many dog kennels, peeped from the sand-hills, and at intervals a cart, laden with small oblong packages, passed through the gates and rumbled along the road to the Red River encampment.

At which Mayfair rubbed his hands together and uttered prophecies.

About seven o'clock we returned, by cross-country paths, to Dynamite village for dinner, but our caution was unnecessary, as the main road was desolate as Cheapside at three in the morning. All had followed the citizen army to the encampment.



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The clocks were striking eight when we regained our eyrie. A strange stillness had fallen upon the camp. Figures moved to and fro, distributing food, but there was no other movement. The Brothers of the Sun were like effigies in a monumental mason's stone-yard. The rag-tag and bob-tail of the citizen army had grown tired or sullen: they no longer hurled recriminations across the spider railings. The dynamite carts trundled no longer along the white road. It was the pause before the tempest.

The sun's movement down the sky was followed by thousands of eager, lifted faces. Just above the horizon hung a bank of purple cloud, and, as the orb — dull, sullen, and blood-red — dipped into the purple, those eager, lifted faces darkened like wheat swept by cloud shadows.

The sun touched the horizon, the colours faded from the sky, birds flew inland, the rushes murmured, as if swept

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by a hand. Every head was turned to the west; nerves were at the point of tension, vibrating to that moment when the eye would look and see nothing. The sun felt the sea, and then the waters swallowed it. In that instant from the summit of each of the hundred golden cupolas a flame leapt towards the heavens — leapt and disappeared in the blue dusk. But upon the white dome a tongue of fire poised itself like some great tropical bird, and there stayed flaming. The spell was broken. A hoarse murmur, which changed to shrill screams and then to shouts of defiance, surged upwards through the warm air. Passion was born anew in the citizen army. Naphtha lamps were lighted, men ran to and fro, dancing like pantomime demons about Captain Tremayne's chair. His arms waved, his great body swayed. A mighty shout greeted the first words of his speech.

Mayfair breathed hard. 'The hour draws near,' he muttered. 'Let us descend

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and see the fun. The lust of battle is upon me.'

So down the sand-hill we stumbled. I did not expostulate. My chilly blood warmed to the crisis.

We crept to the fringe of the camp, and hovered, like two ghosts, just without the line of naphtha lamps. Captain Daniel Tremayne was still haranguing the men, but we were too far away to catch the drift of his oratory. Presently we were challenged by a miner standing sentinel at the western boundary of the encampment. 'The password,' cried he; whereupon we turned and ran like rabbits into hiding, and eventually regained our nest on the sand-hill.

The night was oppressively hot. The deep blue of the sky was cloudless, and studded with stars from verge to verge. The heavy atmosphere pressed on me like a nightmare; and when some furry thing flying past brushed against my cheek, I started like a child in the dark.

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We crouched there in the long grass, watching and waiting. No words passed between us. For the time ours was the policy of inaction. Then the clocks struck eleven.

‘It is time,’ Mayfair whispered. His voice had a note of anxiety quite foreign to it.

We descended the hill on the seaward side, and, the tide being low, walked along the sands till we reached the Red River landing-stage. The sentimental boatman greeted us and led the way to the dingey. We embarked without a word. After an hour’s steady pulling, we spied the passage. I put her head about, and two swinging strokes brought her to the opening. She bobbed like a cork; the keel grated on the sunken breakwater; a cascade of foam drenched me, and then we were in still water, gliding through the wet, shimmering walls of rock that shot up on either side. Far above I saw a patch of blue sky garnitured with stars.

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Slowly we glided along, propelling ourselves by the help of the dank walls, till we reached the tiny shore. It was so small that we could land only by stepping across the other boat, which lay in the same position as when we were last there. Mayfair leapt ashore. Then to the boatman—‘Go back at once to the open. Cruise about till sunrise. Take no notice of anything that may happen, but when you hear the tinkle of my bicycle bell return here as if you were rowing for Doggett’s Coat and Badge. It’ll be a case of life or death, you bet.’

Nothing was changed. Before us peeped the small iron door, like a dark eye in the white cliff. Mayfair pulled it gently open, and once more we stood in the warm, well-lighted passage. Upward we crept. Our stealthy steps were the only sound that broke the silence. Upward we crept till we reached the last of the electric lamps. Mayfair’s hand closed suddenly

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upon mine. The Sanctuary light filtered to us through the gloom.

He ran forward and pressed his face against the grating.

I hurried after him, but as I ran my eyes looked into the darkness and found something there. Our route was not the only passage. There were no fewer than six other tunnels radiating from that chamber, behind the Sanctuary, gaping at me like great mouths. That through which we had approached was the second of the series.

Slipping from Mayfair, who was still peering through the grating, I crept gingerly down the first of the black avenues. I proceeded very slowly, exploring with hands and legs before each step. At the seventh my right foot descended upon air. Trembling, I withdrew a few paces, seated myself upon the ground, and so remained while one might count a hundred: then I stretched myself face downwards upon the ground and waved my hands. They

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flapped into space like a bird's wings. I dropped my penknife over the brink. An age later it splashed into water. I examined another of the passages, and another. They all ended in the same horrid manner—all except that through which we had come.

I returned to Mayfair. His face was still glued to the grating. 'Wait, wait,' he whispered when I plucked him by the coat.

I announced my discovery in a whisper.

'Then keep your eye on Number 2,' he cried. 'Stop! let me see for myself,' and with that he made as if to slip into the nearest of the mouths. But he changed his mind, and dropped instead down the steps to our right. In two minutes he was back at my side.

'As I thought,' he whispered. 'The stairs lead right down into the Sanctuary. There's no door or block of any kind. And now I'll examine our Yellow friend's patent death-traps.'

I watched him step cautiously into the

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first of the mouths, and then I too peered through the grating.

At first the reflections of the great yellow stones that studded the gates which separated the Sanctuary from the Temple dazzled me, but gradually the long aisle, with the beginnings of vast courts, on either side, picked itself from the gloom. The aisle seemed alive, for in it knelt a legion of priests two abreast, pair behind pair, as far as eye could see, their bald heads nodding with the regularity of pendulums.

Within the Sanctuary stood the seven guardians of the Enchanted Stone. From the centre of the floor sprang the pedestal supporting the seven golden pilasters, and between the thumb and first finger of King Nara's skinny hand, black and dull, lay the Enchanted Stone. Upon the squat golden throne sat the Child. Her light hair fell below her waist, her head nodded, but not rhythmically like the heads of the priests. The little maid was past wonder



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— she had fallen asleep. Facing me, midway between the throne and the Sanctuary gates, knelt the Yellow Man. The skin of his face was tight as parchment upon a drum. His eager, anxious eyes were fixed upon the Enchanted Stone. The silence was so profound that I could hear the gentle breathing of the child quite distinctly. Sometimes a bat would flit across the aisle, but that was the only movement save the persistent bobbing of the priests' heads. When Mayfair plucked my sleeve, I started as if I had been awakened from sleep.

‘Any change?’ he asked.

‘None,’ I replied.

He was seated upon the ground, his back resting against the wall.

‘You’re right,’ he yawned, ‘Number 2 is our passage. Good Lord! but I’m sleepy. What time is it?’

I felt for my watch. The dial marked fourteen minutes to three. One hour to sunrise.

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‘Call me early,’ he cried, with a sigh of satisfaction, and closed his eyes. . .

Sleep! Could I ever sleep again? When would Captain Tremayne strike his blow? Would it be before or after sunrise? What sort of resistance would the priests offer? Agitated by these questions I seated myself on the ground by Mayfair’s side. What a fatiguing day it had been! . . . Suddenly I nodded, and then awoke as suddenly. Mayfair was fast asleep. Springing to my feet I peered through the grating. Nothing was changed. The eyes of the guard were still fixed on the Enchanted Stone; the Child still slept; the Yellow Man still knelt—immobile, rigid—before the Enchanted Stone; the mellow light from the Sanctuary lamp still glimmered down the aisle and through the grating; the heads of the priests still bobbed in unison.

I looked at my watch. It wanted but twenty minutes to sunrise. I began to rouse Mayfair.

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Just then a terrific explosion broke upon my ears and reverberated dully through the vast halls of the Temple. It was followed by the rumble of falling masonry, the volume of sound rolling towards us like thunder. The horror of being buried alive drummed in my brain. Another explosion followed, and yet another.

We sprang to our feet and darted to the grating.

The priests had risen, and, like veterans to whom alarms and excursions are but incidents of their business, had pivoted to a man, and now stood, shoulder to shoulder, facing the only quarter whence the foe could advance. All but the Yellow Man. He still knelt before the throne. His eyes were frightful to behold. The irises were dilated, a fierce light blazed from them, and the pupils were contracted to the size of pin heads. The Child was awake, and sat upright, rigid with horror. The guard had drawn nearer to the Enchanted Stone.

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Before our eyes had absorbed the details of this scene another explosion hurtled in the darkness, and again the crash of falling masonry echoed through the vast courts. Shouts and cheers — muffled, faint — reached us. The double line of priests swayed, but they did not move from their places. The Sanctuary lamp flickered and went out. The Child screamed. Then silence.

. . . . .  
Far away at the Temple door appeared a faint blue light which felt its luminous way down the aisle. At the first gleam the arms of the priests shot up, and they broke into a jubilant hymn.

‘The dawn,’ Mayfair whispered.

‘The dawn,’ I echoed.

Suddenly the faint blue mist gave place to a fiery glow, and a mob of wild men surged into the Temple, torches flaming in their hands. With dishevelled hair, and faces distorted with passion, they impinged with roars of triumph upon the

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defenceless priests. Some hurled their torches at the panic-stricken Brothers. Others beat at their faces with the burning tow, fighting with their fists, and tearing at the white robes. Nearer and nearer to the Sanctuary gates came the besiegers, bringing with them the smell of burning flesh, while the pale light of oncoming day crept up behind them.

The Yellow Man's face was the face of a man who has endured great agony and has ceased to feel. Through the frightful noises of that bloody battle he did not once turn his head: his eyes were fixed upon that black, moist object that lay so lightly in King Nara's shrivelled hand.

Nearer drew the besiegers. The priests offered no active resistance. So jammed were they in the narrow aisle that the miners could advance only by tearing them singly from their fellows and flinging their limp bodies on either side like bales of merchandise. The foremost of the besiegers were but a few paces from the

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gates, and only a score of helpless priests stood wedged between them and the Sanctuary, when Mayfair shouted, 'Look! the Captain is coming.'

A dozen men, stripped to the waist, suddenly appeared at the Temple door, advancing at a gallop up the aisle, and in their wake came Captain Tremayne's chair, to which they were harnessed, thundering over the flags. He was leaning forward, brandishing a chopper above his head, cursing the priests and shouting encouragement to his human steeds. As his chariot lumbered towards the Sanctuary gates, the advance fighters hurled themselves upon the remnant of priests, while the main body of miners poured pell-mell through the Temple door and rushed up the aisle after their leader.

Then, all in a moment, that gross hub-hub became silent as a churchyard at midnight. It was as if every howling unit had been struck into sleep like the King and Court in the legend, but here it

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was with amazement. For just as the shouts of the victors had reached their zenith, a ray of light flashed down the aisle and fell upon the Enchanted Stone.

A pæan of joy went up from the scattered priests. Bleeding and bruised, they rushed back to the aisle of the Temple, laughing, dancing and crying in the ray of light. Captain Daniel Tremayne sat upright in his chair, stiff as an Indian idol, and breathing heavily. The Child shaded her eyes with her hands. The Yellow Man cried aloud and fell upon his face. And the Enchanted Stone glowed, palpitated, and lifted itself from King Nara's hand in the light of the life-giving sun.

Speechless all stood, gazing. Captain Tremayne was the first to break the spell. He roared to his followers to continue the fighting, and even as he cried the ray of light vanished from the aisle, and the Enchanted Stone became black and lifeless as before. Yelling, the besiegers hurled themselves against the Sanctuary gates,

shattered them, and almost in the same moment were fighting to the death with the six guardians of the Enchanted Stone.

The seventh, their Captain, took no part in the conflict.

He stood sentinel by the Child. The six guards did not waste themselves in aimless cuttings and slashings, but with cool precision drove their long blades home. Soon the floor was a medley of writhing bodies. Into this wriggling, bleeding mass, Captain Tremayne's chair was whirled. The force of the impact overturned the chair. The Captain fell heavily to the ground, and the half-nude men who acted as his horses tumbled head-long into the writhing, screaming, fighting bodies on the Sanctuary floor.

All this I saw in a flash. My eyes beheld it, and memory retained the impression, but not by any conscious effort: for it was the Yellow Man who held my attention. When the half-nude men dragging Captain Tremayne's chair broke



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through the Sanctuary gates, he sprang to his feet, and, thrusting the Captain of the Guard aside, grabbed at the Enchanted Stone.

But Daniel Tremayne was too quick for him. Pitched from his chair, he rolled over upon his left shoulder, and, as the Oriental's hand clutched the Enchanted Stone he raised his arm and brought the chopper down upon the Yellow Man's wrist.

The hand fell to the ground grasping the Enchanted Stone.

The Yellow Man uttered no cry, but stooping, he picked up his own hand, which still clutched the Enchanted Stone as in a vice, and, leaping over the limbs and legs writhing upon the floor, he disappeared through the door to the right of the Sanctuary. The Captain of the Guard seized the Child and followed him. As the twain bounded up the steps we drew back into the darkness, and in another moment they swept past us and disappeared down the

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second passage. The Child was hysterical with fear.

‘Come!’ cried Mayfair. ‘Quick! quick!!’

In truth there was need to hasten, for at that moment a dozen maddened faces appeared at the foot of the steps. Together we sprang forward and raced down the second passage. Hardly had we gone twenty yards when a succession of agonised cries smote upon our ears.

We stopped.

‘It was a seven to one chance,’ said Mayfair, ‘poor devils!’

I caught him by the sleeve as he prepared to rush forward again.

‘There’s no need to hurry now,’ I said.

‘What!’ he roared, ‘no need to hurry? I mean to get hold of the Enchanted Stone. It’s a quarter of a mile ahead of us by this time. Run, man, run!’

As we debouched upon the tiny shore, Mayfair rang his bicycle bell vehemently. The gulls whirled upwards screaming, and

in another minute down the still waterway came our dingey.

‘Seen anything of a boat containing two men and a child, one of them wounded?’ cried Mayfair, as we leapt aboard.

The man jerked his head towards the open sea. ‘Passed me three minutes ago,’ he answered, ‘and mighty hurry they seemed to be in.’

‘Twenty pounds if you catch them,’ shouted Mayfair.

He went at it with a will, but when we reached the open I was relieved to see how wide was the expanse of water that separated us. The Yellow Man’s boat was steering straight for a small steam yacht, lying about half a mile from the shore.

‘Catch them before they board her and I’ll make it fifty pounds,’ cried Mayfair.

We certainly gained, for our man was stronger at the oar than the Captain of the Guard, but a full cable’s length still separated us when they reached their goal.

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Dark, willing hands dragged them aboard, but I could not see distinctly, — in fact I was obliged to shade my eyes, for the yacht lay right against the sun. When I looked again she was steaming eastward at full speed.

The Yellow Man was kneeling upon the deck. His body shook with sobs. The maimed limb dropped blood. He did not see the shining accoutrements of a regiment of cavalry galloping through Junction-town, he did not see the Sun Temple going up in smoke and flame to a daffodil sky, for his head was bowed in shame before the risen sun.







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# THE ENCHANTED STONE

